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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

WAITING ON HOLLYWOOD:

THE TALE OF AN ITALIAN BIT PLAYER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HISTORY

BY

KIRBY T. PRINGLE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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ABSTRACT

Most actors who worked in Hollywood during the Golden Age were uncredited on-screen. They received little publicity and their collective story is generally neglected. The personal correspondence, contracts, and photographs of one unknown actor, Gino Corrado, gives us new insights into the history of film. Tracing Corrado's personal story, this dissertation, told as a microhistory, elucidates major issues in motion picture history such as labor disputes, political loyalties, ethnic affiliations, and the career paths of working actors between the world wars.

Corrado's story is in many ways a counter-narrative to film history biographies. This dissertation argues that the strategies of individual actors were opportunistic, everchanging and much more complex than previously thought. Corrado's massive filmography of over 500 films lends credibility to his knack of surviving as a working actor. As a waiter and later a restaurateur, his story also illuminates the centrality of food to the film industry.

INTRODUCTION

This is a tale of Hollywood told through the gritty life of a bit player—a working actor that played a multitude of small character roles during the Golden Age of Hollywood. You have seen his image in nearly every movie of the 1930s and 1940s where there is a restaurant scene. He was uncredited, and meant to be unknown. He was just another background. Or was he? I argue a complete picture of one of America's biggest industries requires examining Hollywood from the bottom up. Rather than centering the story on the stars or the moguls, I focus on the daily life of an employee so as to compare and contrast the human experience in the often insular world of motion pictures.

Gino Corrado was born in 1893 in Pisa, Italy and his parents quickly moved to Florence—an Italian city inextricably tied to art. His father was a marble and art dealer who travelled internationally to exhibit at world's fairs, and ultimately immigrated to the United States. Corrado himself immigrated in 1908, worked as a sculptor for several years and eventually entered the film industry in Hollywood. Between 1916 and 1960, he appeared in more than 500 American films—often playing a French or Italian waiter on-screen.

Although he was essentially “invisible,” Corrado appeared in many of America's most expensive and widely seen films in the 1930s and 1940s. His career started with D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916). Then he worked in Mack Sennett's comedic one reelers, and, later in Cecil B. DeMille's silent picture epic *The Ten Commandments*

(1923). Corrado appeared in the flapper picture *Flaming Youth*, a mega box office hit that popularized the flapper girl, and towards the end of the silent film era he was in *Sunrise*, F.W. Murnau's big budget romantic tale. These roles led to several co-starring performances such as in *The Iron Mask* in 1929, where he had a brief brush with stardom playing opposite Douglas Fairbanks as one of the Three Musketeers. During the sound era, an aging Corrado—who never lost his Italian accent—had trouble finding work and was eventually typecast as a waiter playing bit parts in a multitude of movies that included *Gone with the Wind*, *Casablanca*, and *Citizen Kane*. Studio publicity claimed that in the 18 years he had played waiters he averaged 28 waiter roles per year. One example of the widely-seen pictures he appeared in is evident by the films nominated for Best Picture at the 1942 Academy Awards. Corrado acted in half of them: *Foreign Correspondent*, *The Great Dictator*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Kitty Foyle*, and the year's winner, *Rebecca*.

Corrado is a micohistorical vehicle who can illuminate Hollywood culture during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition to the sheer multitude of his appearances in high-caliber films and his work in movieland restaurants, Corrado also left letters, contracts, and photographs that illustrate American film history. I employ Corrado to examine several themes in the history of American cinema: (1) the importance and role of bit playing, (2) the emergence of Italians in Hollywood, (3) the industrialization and corporatization of the industry during the sound era (4) Vittorio's Mussolini's visit to America and its importance to Italians like Corrado associated with

the film colony and “Fascist Hollywood,” and (5) the social significance of restaurants and food in Hollywood.

Countless memoirs document the dreamlike experience of stardom and the brief moment that fandom focused popular attention on the professional, romantic, and financial life of an individual. This dissertation examines something else. This is an attempt to view the motion picture industry as a manufacturing process with the workers having agency, in other words, having dreams and career strategies. Did they compete with other workers in their industry and other industries? How did movie workers move up (or down) the ladder? What was the residential pattern in a company town? What was their passion outside of work? What caused them to thrive or feel stifled as creative artists? What did those at the bottom actually think about their bosses, some of the richest and most powerful men in America? How did their corporate policies affect them?

Hollywood was a factory town that manufactured amusements for the public. But with the long hours, down time, and chaotic excitement of production, we forget that there was a reality in the creative process that was as nine-to-five as any other factory job. Books have been written about factory workers in their respective industries such as the steel industry, the automobile industry, or the aviation industry—but what was it like to be a worker inside an amusement factory waiting for your line? Waiting to be discovered? Or, more often, outside the studio waiting tables? To be sure there was a boomtown excitement, a kind of waiting for the good grace of luck to befall on oneself to occur. Sometimes it did. But often it did not. We usually read about those few that had

the luck, the breaks, or the connections. In acting, much like in music, there is the front man, the star, the face. But what about the players in the background?

Most of Corrado's roles were as a bit player (an actor of small parts that were uncredited on screen) which did not warrant informative studio publicity. This was an important, yet overlooked, element of the acting profession. Less than ten actors were usually credited onscreen in each picture of the 1930s and 1940s. Since this affected a majority of actors, one can argue that the backbone of the profession were those unknown actors, like Corrado, who appeared in hundreds of films over several decades that gave support to the stars. What was the day to day world of the bit player? What were some of the strategies utilized by these working actors? To answer these questions, this study thus requires a bottom-up approach which is rarely undertaken by film scholars. My project asks questions about where power originated in Hollywood, but I uncover the voices of working-class actors, and focus mainly on a narrow range of ten years of 1937-1947 and the political battle within Hollywood itself.

Actors were represented by trade unions, such as the Screen Actors Guild or the Screen Extras Guild that were formed in the 1930s. These two organizations represented nearly all actors of different levels and Corrado was a member of both. Despite the great strides in representation of actors' concerns, not all actors were willing participants or were happy with the unionization or work stoppages because of strikes. In fact, at several intervals, Corrado considered returning to his native Italy though he ultimately decided to remain in Hollywood as a bit player.

Corrado's experiences gives an opportunity to give a personal context to immigration paths and Italian communities. In fact, he or his family lived in many of the largest Italian American communities outside of Italy including New York, Boston, Hartford, Chicago, St. Louis, San Diego, and finally Los Angeles. Corrado's immigration provides an understanding of Italian America at the early part of the twentieth century.

Between 1876 and 1914, one-third of Italy's population emigrated. Most studies of Italian immigrant history follow the southern Italian experience, but most of America's Italian immigrants in the nineteenth-century era of immigration were from north or central Italy. Corrado's story is distinct from most immigrant tales in that his family was educated and not poor, nor were they from the south of Italy. His father and uncle were briefly "padroni," Italian work-bosses that hired the surplus of Italian labor for the building trades, railroads, and other industries. In the Chicago area, where Corrado was sent to study for the priesthood, his father opened a vaudeville house in the city and he likely witnessed a booming theater and nickelodeon industry. San Diego became California's film capital prior to World War I, just before studios moved to Hollywood. Corrado worked as a sculptor on the San Diego fair working with renowned Italian sculptors and making props for local studios on his own time.

Corrado landed in the Elysian Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, the Little Italy section of what is today's Chinatown. Italians wielded considerable influence in the city, but did this extend into the film world? What was the experience of the Italians in Hollywood? It is unknown what percentage of Hollywood's movie workers were Italian, and little is known about the experiences of Hollywood's Italian actors, with a few

exceptions. Corrado was one of a few Italians who worked in front of the camera and it is significant in that he was also one of those Italians behind the scenes in artistic or culinary trades such as set design and food catering.

When a large part of the motion picture industry moved to the San Fernando Valley during World War II, Corrado followed, and I examine his residence pattern, along with the construction of Studio City. Although there is much more scholarly work to do in this area, it is a start at explaining the housing, residences, company towns, and commuting in a fast-changing motion picture urban environment. The promotion of the Studio City neighborhood to movie workers, for instance, tells us much about how these workers lived and what appealed to them.

The studios were the nation's most glamorous factories as featured in magazines, but what was it like in the studios in the "studio era?" Stephanie Frank, a planning historian, looked at the studio buildings, the planning, and construction and concluded: "Studios were and remain manufacturing plants; they look more like airplane manufacturing sites than star-filled playgrounds."¹ I treat the studios as factories, Corrado as one of the factory's workers, and the mogul (the head of the studio) is the industrialist.

Corrado's story serves to highlight power relations between the studio heads and workers. The studio moguls, virtually all of Central or Eastern European Jewish ancestry, helped propel their media empire by creating an image of themselves as benevolent, rags-

¹ Stephanie Frank, "Claiming Hollywood: Boosters, the Film Industry, and Metropolitan Los Angeles," *Journal of Urban History* 2012 38 (1): 80.

to-riches, entrepreneurial immigrants that made good in America—a people that forged an industry from the ground up. But how did the workers inside the studio gates see it? Corrado, like many, believed that Jews had monopolized the business and practiced nepotism, especially after a flood of immigrants landed as refugees when Germany nationalized the industry in the mid-1930s. Using correspondence and magazine articles—as well as case studies of other nations such as France—Corrado was hardly alone in this view and the Hollywood factory was actually rife with workers' resistance to what they perceived as Jewish domination of the industry.

Vittorio Mussolini, the Italian premiere's son, stirred the emotions of many Italians on his visit to Hollywood in late 1937. Corrado was one of those that was involved in a deal between the young Mussolini and producer Hal Roach to start a company and release several co-productions with Laurel and Hardy. Corrado was offered an assistant director position in the new venture in Italy, but the project never materialized. I will explore the following questions: What did the Hollywood film colony expect from the visit and intended co-production between the young Mussolini and Roach? Corrado made plans to go to Italy as an assistant director in Vittorio Mussolini's company, and his story provokes a consideration of Italian film companies and the policies of the Italian government regarding cinema.

How did Italian actors in Hollywood respond to Mussolini's calls to rebuild the Italian film industry and free its screens from American domination? Was there an actual active "fascist Hollywood"? In fact, in an interview given in 1971, Corrado claimed he was blacklisted in Hollywood (relegated to bit parts) during the war for his work with Il

Duce's son, Vittorio Mussolini, in 1937. I assess that the first major battle between fascists and communists in Hollywood that took place in the late 1930s. This subsequently resulted in the first use of blacklists against accused fascists and anti-Semites ordered by studios such as Warner Brothers. This dissertation explores the meeting in Hollywood and attempted co-production in detail to discern what Vittorio Mussolini meant to the Italian film industry's hopes in America, what the Italian film workers in Hollywood, like Corrado, thought of his visit, exactly why it never materialized, and how Corrado was later perceived for having been attached to the young Mussolini's entourage.

My project gives a wider context of the meeting of Roach and Mussolini by using newly discovered archival sources with an examination of the Italian film industry as seen through the eyes of a participant and the larger Italian community in Los Angeles. As part of Mussolini's entourage and his personal interpreter, Corrado's story creates an entirely new interpretation of this major event. This version of Mussolini's visit reads as a counter-narrative to other articles and book chapters, particularly Thomas Doherty's chapter in *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939* titled "Mussolini Jr. Goes Hollywood," in which his version of the events is mainly drawn from the newsletters of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League.²

² Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

The last theme that emerges from this exploration of Gino Corrado's life is the role of restaurants in the motion picture industry. I have dedicated two chapters of this dissertation to examine food and food workers, one chapter that focuses on waiters, the other on restaurants: "The Hunger in Hollywood: Strikes, Cafes, and Actors in the 1940s" and "Catering to the Studios: Restaurants and the Business of Feeding the Movie Industry."

In 1947 Gino Corrado faced a major dilemma. The actor had appeared in countless movies as a bit player, often playing a waiter. In fact, he had recently celebrated his 400th role as a waiter—a Hollywood record—with a party on the set of one of the pictures. Now, due to strikes that had originated from conflicts between set decorators and the big studio bosses, his industry was on the brink of collapse. Many actors supported other craft guilds and joined a sympathy strike. The studios responded by economizing specifically by eliminating lavish, opulent scenes that required costly nightclub and restaurant sets—a strategy that affected extras and bit players. Corrado was especially affected as he had worked almost exclusively on these sets. To complicate matters, Corrado was offered a head waiter job at a restaurant that catered to the film colony. He also had a mortgage and a brand new bouncing baby girl. Should he take the position and become a "reel life headwaiter," as one *New York Times* article about him was titled?³

Restaurants were central in Hollywood culture. Members of filmland discussed movie deals with their agent, had their cars admired, or were seen with their latest love

³ "From Reel Life to Real Life Headwaiter," *New York Times*, 7 August 1949, X-3.

conquest, sometimes with reporters snapping photos at Café Montmartre, the Brown Derby, Ciro's, Chasen's, the Cocoanut Grove, Macombo's, Romanoff's, Florentine Gardens, and a host of others. Corrado, who played a waiter in many of America's biggest pictures, found himself out of work due to strikes crippling the motion picture industry. He subsequently became a real life waiter in several famous eateries frequented by Hollywood and thus mimicked his work on-screen serving actors again. He eventually opened his own restaurant. His experience helps tell a wider story about how Italians were involved in catering for Hollywood, as well as how restaurants were of symbolic importance in the movie colony as somewhere struggling actors moonlighted, a place a successful actor could denote status, and as the preferred locale to conduct business negotiations, thus making Hollywood's restaurants culturally significant.

Foodways, where culture, dietary habits, and tradition converge, played a vital role in the film industry. With nutrition important for optimum screen performance and clocking long hours, the major studios made food central to their business model and had commissaries inside the studios and used professional caterers on set. Although not the focus of this dissertation, Corrado's brother ran the commissary at Fox Studios and another brother was also a waiter at a Hollywood favorite cafe. The more we know about consumption in Hollywood the more detailed picture we get of the film industry, its culture, and its impact on the world's culinary habits.

Corrado is a key informant for examining foodways in early Hollywood. He was a working actor, he played a waiter and chef on-screen, and he was a real life restaurateur and I argue he was the world's most famous waiter. Foodways was important in

Hollywood as actors, if they were successful, advertised or endorsed particular food items and contributed to cookbooks, and some directors and producers invested in certain restaurants and food manufacturing companies (after real estate and highbred horses, restaurants were the next most popular investment for this group). Corrado left a testament to his restaurateuring and his story intersects in nearly all aspects of the culinary history of Hollywood.

Also of importance to foodways, Corrado was Italian. The motion picture industry's small Italian population was disproportionately involved in Hollywood's culinary history with their creation of several dishes and the opening of Italian restaurants. Though little is known about this ethnic group in the film industry or the foodways for them or for the majority of those film workers that were less than famous, Corrado has the potential to inform what the film capital's culinary practices were and how this shaped popular culture.

Corrado was arguably the most famous waiter in the world—certainly the most widely seen—as Hollywood's eternal waiter for much of film's golden age (roughly 1917 to 1960). Even today on touristy Hollywood Boulevard, one can find t-shirts that are printed “So you're an actor? What restaurant do you work at?” attesting to the fact that most actors, even if they actually find work in their field, are dependent on the food service industry to survive. Corrado lasted five decades in the movies and experienced first-hand many of the long-term changes and developments in the industry. He represents an often-ignored perspective that informs how the film industry worked, and his experience included literally waiting on Hollywood.

I stumbled across Gino Corrado's story by accident as a dealer of ephemera and photographs. As a collector of historical documents, primarily those pertaining to Los Angeles history, my hobby turned into a mania, and I began dealing old post cards and film memorabilia to fund my habit, feed my collection, and later—almost as an afterthought—to pay my rent. Several local antique store and junk shop owners were happy to set aside paper (ephemera) they had found at local estate sales which I would buy in bulk and would occasionally haggle for the lowest price—as you make your money when you buy not when you sell. On my weekly visit to Linda Lou's, a small antique store (no longer in existence) in the west San Fernando Valley, I spotted several large 1920s era sepia-toned photos. Printed on thick stock and the size of lobby cards, I bought them all and assumed that they were passed over by other dealers because they were poorly displayed behind several dishes in a curio cabinet. "That's Gino," the store's owner Ernie Black told me, "He was one of the Three Musketeers." Thus began a series of deals with Ernie to purchase the entire collection.

As a dealer, my original intention was to resell. But when I began researching Corrado's forgotten correspondence (much of which was in Italian), contracts, and photographs, I soon discovered this story easily lent itself as a micro-history about early Hollywood.

Although there was a celebration of America's early cinematic heritage in the 1950s, a rediscovery and appreciation of the work of Corrado would have been nearly impossible until recent times. With obscure material from private collections—including lost films—offered on Ebay and other auction sites, and remastered DVD reissues, it has

become easier to gather bits of a bit player's story. The American Film Institute's ongoing project of reviewing older call sheets and updating the Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com) filled in much of the gap, revealing an astounding filmography. In fact, Corrado appears in a large percentage of the movies on American Film Institute's Top 100 Films of All Time list—three of the first five listed (#1 *Citizen Kane*, #2 *Casablanca*, and #4 *Gone with the Wind*). Corrado's penciled mustache character often comes to mind when one thinks of a waiter or chef, and the character has been featured on *The Simpsons* and in the recent *The Three Stooges* movie released in 2012.

To know Corrado's story is to know the story of Hollywood. But before we dive into annals of film history, we must start at the beginning.

CHAPTER ONE
THE BEGINNING:
A FLORENTINE FAMILY'S IMMIGRATION PATH TO AMERICA

Corrado was born Eugenio Corrado Liserani on February 9, 1893 in Italy. Most discussions about the actor identify his birthplace as Florence. In fact Gino himself proudly claimed Florence as his birth city. However, records reveal that he was born in Pisa, in the region of Tuscany about forty miles from Florence.¹ This may have been because his parents returned to Italy from traveling to the United States just two weeks before his birth, if Gino's later studio publicity is to be believed.² In any case, Gino's family was based in Florence, and unlike the majority of underprivileged rural immigrants from the south of Italy who immigrated to America, some members of his family were upper class, and some of his relatives were professionals. Several of his kin were international traders, such as one relative—an uncle of Gino—who imported American goods into Florence, sold railway tickets, and exchanged foreign currency. Gino's grandfather, Carlo Liserani, was a merchant and exhibitor of international fairs. More than simply trade shows, these international events focused on modernity and progress by exhibiting developments in science and technology. However these

¹ Certificate of Death for Gino Corrado Liserani, County of Los Angeles, clearly states birthplace of deceased as "Pisa, Italy."

² Agnes O'Malley, "Gino Corrado Biography." Original typed three paged press release for actor Gino Corrado written for the release of *The Iron Mask* (1929), hereafter referred to as O'Malley, Gino Corrado Biography. GCC.

spectacles also drew from a classical tradition of ancient pageantry that celebrated empires such as that of ancient Rome where roads and political stability could attract international visitors to a major event. Significantly, these fairs often featured architecture—massive and opulent—and in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the latest motion picture equipment in its most primitive stages, beginning with rudimentary photography and cycloramas.

In Australia at the Sydney International Exhibit of 1879, Carlo Liserani was a representative agent of Italy. When the new Italian nation (unified only in 1871) could not finance the Italian exhibit, Liserani, along with a financial partner, delivered the works of the preeminent artists of Florence himself. He also brought a shipload of goods that included mosaics, filigree work in gold and silver, wood-carving, marble statues, and Italian wines. The local newspaper stated that the determination and expense of the two chief exhibitors “entitled their efforts to our respect” and reported that the mosaic tables in the Italian Court section of the exhibition halls received more attention than any other piece of art at the entire fair.³

One can surmise that the exhibitions were somewhat successful as Liserani returned to Australia for several other fairs including the Jubilee International Exhibition in Adelaide in 1887. Liserani worked the Centennial International Exhibition in 1888-1889 (the largest public event attempted in Australian history at that time) which celebrated the arrival of European civilization and inter-colonial cooperation between

³14 July 1879 ship’s log for “Mr. Liserani.” departing from Venice, arriving in Sydney aboard the Siam. Ancestry.com. Victoria, Australia, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, 1839–1923 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2009.

Britain and Australia. Over two million people attended the lavish six-part fair in Melbourne. At the United States' exhibit, Liserani may have viewed the popular displays of the new electric Singer sewing machine that was revolutionizing ready-wear clothing, the gasoline engine, or Thomas A. Edison's latest—the phonograph machine—along with art galleries from a multitude of nations at other exhibit halls.⁴

In April 1893, two months after Gino was born, his twenty-four-year-old father (who had the same name as Gino's grandfather), Carlo Liserani, traveled from the Italian port of Genoa to Chicago where he was an exhibitor at the World's Columbian Fair.⁵ The ship's passage records indicate that Gino's father's occupation was a marble merchant. On ship, he had his own private quarters, but seemed to be traveling with three other marble dealers whose last residence was, like his, Palermo, Sicily. In the nearby rooms, the occupations of many of these sojourners were tied in some way with marble: artist, sculptor, engraver, stonecutter, or (like Liserani's case) marble dealer. Most other passengers were from Genoa or Naples; but a large portion were Tuscans, several from

⁴ John E. Findling, and Kimberly D. Pelle, *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 92; 97-99. *The South Australian Advertiser* 14 July 1879, 4; *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 August 1879, 3. Also on 9 July 1888, "C. Liserani" travelled to Australia as an "artist." See "Liserani." departing from Venice, arriving in Sydney aboard the *Arcadia*. Victoria, Australia, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, 1839–1923 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2009.

⁵ Liserani is mentioned in indictments against him and several other foreign exhibitors at the Chicago Columbian World's Fair for failing to provide proper customs documentation for their merchandise. The charges were later dropped. See the western supplement (Chicago) of *The Jewelers' Circular and Horological Review*, Volume 27, No. 22 (27 December 1893), 1.

the cities of Florence or Pisa, but most hailed from Carrara—the town and quarry that fed Chicago’s appetite for the best marble that shared the town’s namesake.⁶

When Liserani visited Chicago, the city was experiencing an economic boom and had a large Italian population of almost 20,000, which rapidly grew to 100,000 by 1910.⁷ Liserani would have found that Italians from his city of Florence had a strong presence and had become successful in the metropolis. In 1871, only two decades before the visit of Gino’s father, the disastrous Chicago fire swept through a large part of the city. In the aftermath of the tragedy, Joseph Medill successfully ran for mayor as part of a “Fireproof Party” platform that assured voters of new stringent fire safety codes, such as the prohibiting of wooden structures.⁸ Some city leaders looked to the city of Florence as a model of fire-resistant masonry. The *Chicago Times* rejoiced when the Vice-Consul of Italy who represented Chicago’s growing Italian population reported, “...that the desires of our citizens to erect substantial fire-proof buildings for the future, has induced about thirty of the best masons of Florence and other large cities of Italy to embark for this country, and they have now arrived in Chicago.”⁹

⁶ Ship Passage Record; New York from Genoa, April 4, 1893. Interestingly, most of the Italians traveling in the second cabin with the final destination of Chicago were artists, sculptors, architects or stone cutters.

⁷ Italian Chamber of Commerce, Volume 4, no. 4 (1911 July 10) Chicago Foreign Press Survey. Box 27: II Contributions and Activities. Special Collections, University of Illinois, Chicago.

⁸ Bessie Louise Pierce, *As Others See Chicago: Impressions of Visitors, 1673-1933* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 208.

⁹ *The Chicago Times*, July 22, 1872, from the Chicago Foreign Press Survey, Box 28; III. Assimilation; F. Special Contributions. The luxurious Palmer House, built in the post-fire era may have been the first building to exhibit these qualities.

The preferred building materials used in constructing luxury steel frame buildings were granite, terra cotta, tile, brick, and marble—of the latter ingredient used for opulence, the highest quality was white Carrara marble from Tuscany.¹⁰ In fact, the same ancient Carrara quarry which gave the stone its namesake had supplied the marble for the Michelangelo statue in Italy centuries earlier.

Liserani would have learned that most of the first Italian immigrants in Chicago were Genoese merchants, but Tuscans were also early arrivals. The Italian immigrants that came to Chicago from the Tuscany region, where the Liseranis originated, were usually artisans. One of the five Italians listed in the 1854 Chicago city directory, a Tuscan from Lucca, was a maker and vender of plaster statues—a “figurani,” in Italian. In the 1870s, John and Charles DePrato, brothers from Lucca who formed the DePrato Statuary Company, were located at Clark and Van Buren; they became the world’s largest producer of religious art. Other artisans from the Lucca area branched out into ornamental stucco, gold leaf, and frescoes, and whose work became the vogue in all the leading theaters and homes of Chicago. Another Tuscan, Giovanni Meli, and his son, Vincent, were the sculptors of the bas-relief and statuary at the Palmer House, the hotel of Chicago’s leading citizens.¹¹

¹⁰ Frank A. Randall and John Randall, *The History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago*; 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1999), 228. The Marshall Field Building was erected in 1892 using these materials.

¹¹ Rudolph John Vecoli, “Chicago’s Italians Prior to World War I: A Study of Their Social and Economic Adjustment” (PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1962), 19-22.

Liserani exhibited marble and possibly other decorative items at the Chicago fair which opened in May 1893. The fair itself was an imposing showplace for marble. For example, the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building, was three times larger than St. Peter's Cathedral and four times that of the Coliseum in Rome and cost \$1.5 million to build. The marble needed reportedly cost \$118,000. Another building, the Palace of the Fine Arts, surely used a large amount of Italian craftsmen by the scale of the project—50,000 square feet of Italian marble and twenty acres of plaster.¹² Over 12,000 workmen were used in its construction, but the exact number of Italians involved in the construction of the fair's buildings is unknown. There were at least enough workers to form one on-site Italian local, the Ornamental Plasterers and Shophands, which disbanded once the construction of the fair was completed, but not before donating the \$140 in their treasury to a local Catholic hospital.¹³

The World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago was America's greatest architectural event and assembled an unparalleled number of sculptors in one place not seen since the Renaissance. The fair served as a training ground for America's leading sculptors, despite a material called "staff"—not marble—that was often substituted for the expensive stone. After the fair ended, commissions for ornamental sculpture on buildings and public statuary never came to fruition. Despite trade unions demanding a

¹² "Four Big Buildings," *Chicago Daily*, January 22, 1893, 34.

¹³ *L'Italia*, June 19, 1893 from the Chicago Foreign Press Survey. Box 27: II Contributions and Activities. University of Chicago Special Collections Library. See also "Labor Leaders Against Harrison," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 3, 1893, 3. L.B.A. Zangrando was President of the Italian Marble and Mosaic Workers.

campaign of public works, sculptors vacated Chicago. In fact, Liserani left and returned a few years later. Still, several of Chicago's public buildings commissioned in the early 1890s required several tons of Carrara marble for statuary and staircases. A strategy to win tenants or businesses for a skyscraper was to use the building's superior workmanship as a character reference, requiring genuine ornamentation such as Florentine mosaics and Italian marble.¹⁴

The Columbian Exposition had also provided the newest in technological advancements. A booth was rented to Thomas Edison for his exhibition of a prototype of his Kinetoscope machine at the fair. Despite the wild curiosity of the fair's attendees to see a few seconds of a flickering moving picture through a tiny peep hole of the small machine installed inside of a cabinet, the Kinetoscope still had glitches and probably did not arrive.¹⁵ An Englishman by the name of Edweard Muybridge erected his "Zooprographical Hall" at another exhibit booth, where his stereopticon showed animals in motion. One maker of optical lenses from Philadelphia (and future movie pioneer), Siegmund Lubin, marveled at Muybridge's camera that captured a horse in stride and remembered later that "I decided to experiment with the idea then."¹⁶

¹⁴ Daniel M. Bluestone, *Constructing Chicago* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 123.

¹⁵ Bernard Brown, *Talking Pictures; A Practical and Popular Account of the Principles of Construction and Operation of the Apparatus Used in Making and Showing Sound Films* (London: Sir I. Pitman & Sons, Ltd, 1931), 2. There is some controversy if the machine was actually exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair, but most evidence points to at least one machine having arrived at the Edison booth.

¹⁶ Joseph P. Eckhardt, *The King of the Movies: Film Pioneer Siegmund Lubin* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 17.

Gino first came to America as a toddler in 1895 with his mother, Caterina Tessitori Liserani. Four months later, ship's passenger records show that Carlo Liserani (now listed simply as a "negoziante"—a businessman), who had briefly returned to Italy, made the ten day trek to America once more to meet his wife and child. The couple settled in New York City, and for a few years they lived near Carlo Liserani's brother Cyrus who himself had recently arrived in America and was newly married to a young woman from Ireland.

The two Liserani households lived adjacent to Coney Island in Brooklyn coinciding with massive investment in the resort area's conversion to an amusement park zone. As the Chicago World's Fair had inspired architectural grandeur in America, the entrepreneurs who built Coney Island based many of their attractions, such as Dreamland or Luna Park, on that of the Chicago fair's white imaginary buildings, large midway, and huge Ferris wheel, for the purpose of attracting a mass audience. Several of these spectacular buildings housed the ethnic displays (such as the Italian-themed "Fall of Pompeii" or Venetian canals), mechanical devices (such as scientific displays, pre-cinema stereopticon displays and kinetoscope shows), or dance ballrooms. Considering Carlo Liserani's previous experience, it is likely that he and his brother worked on the buildings as artisans or in construction.¹⁷

¹⁷Claire Prentice, *The Lost Tribe of Coney Island: Headhunters, Luna Park, and the Man who Pulled Off the Spectacle of the Century* (Boston; New York: New Harvest, 2014), 54-61; 105-109. John F. Kosson, *Amusing the Millions: Coney Island at the Turn-of-the-Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 26-28. Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the Century New York* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986) 126-131.

Coney Island was the first large amusement district in the nation, and several debates arose as to the moral transformation of the area. The courting of females and the middle-class created a shift in the composition of the clientele, as the developers of the district attempted to create a family-friendly atmosphere to maximize respectability.¹⁸ However, several reformers and preachers railed against the amusement park—primarily the small sideshows, vaudeville, dancing, and rowdiness. A few years later, Reverend A.C. Dixon, the brother of playwright and preacher Thomas Dixon and the creator of the term “Fundamentalism” as applied to practical Christianity, denounced Coney Island as a suburb of Sodom.¹⁹ Despite the controversy, Coney Island was immensely popular with hundreds of thousands of leisure-seekers attracted to the amusements and beach, and Liserani and his brother would have glimpsed the commercialization of leisure in a grand scale not seen since ancient Rome.

Gino’s parents soon moved around the Eastern seaboard, first to Boston for two years where the oldest of Gino’s siblings, Luigi (also known as Louis) was born in 1896. By 1899 Carlo (sometimes going by Charles), “Katherina,” seven-year old Gino, and his three little brothers who were all American citizens by birth, were living in Hartford, Connecticut. The newest editions to Gino’s family were Corrado, born in Hartford in

¹⁸ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 130-133.

¹⁹ “Preached on Coney Island: The Rev A.C. Dixon Called the Resort in His Sermon a Suburb of Sodom,” *New York Times* 5 July 1897, 3.

1898; and Lorenzo (Lawrence) born in 1900, also in Hartford. Carlo Liserani supported the family by working as a painter according to the city directory.²⁰

A contemporary social scientist reported that a large number of farms that were abandoned by the original settlers who went west or moved to the city were occupied by Italians in the western part of the state of New York and in the Connecticut River Valley. In New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, over 500 farms were estimated to have been occupied by Italians—mainly Northern Italians, despite their smaller numbers (20 per cent of the total Italian population, as compared to Southern Italians).²¹ In the county area that surrounded Hartford, particularly South Glastonbury, several hundred Northern Italians purchased farms where raising fruit—peaches and apples—became a leading exclusive Northern Italian occupation to be protected against from the numerically superior Southern Italians (evidenced by the formation of Northern Italian societies and eventually the North Italy Fruit Growers Union, an anti-Sicilian trade organization). Noticing the tremendous growth of American cities and realizing the profit from marketing produce from the surrounding lands, a few Northern Italians partnered with Americans in the purchase of large orchards. As the head of the household, Carlo Liserani tried his luck as a fruit dealer, leaving the city and basing his operation in

²⁰ In 1899 the Liserani family lived at 106 ½ Trumball in Hartford. Charles Liserani is listed as a painter in the Greer's Hartford 1899 City Directory, 240.

²¹ Albert Pecorini, "The Italian as Agricultural Laborer," *Annals of the American Academy of Politics and Social Science*, Vol.3, No. 2. Labor and Wages (March 1909), 159-160. The author writes on page 158: "Of the 1,200,000 laboring Italians mentioned, 80 per cent came from Southern Italy and Sicily, regions that are almost exclusively agricultural, and 20 per cent came from Northern Italy, a region where the industrial development has been most rapid; yet of the Italians engaged in agriculture in the United States more than 50 per cent are from Northern Italy."

Canton Township in the highly industrialized Hartford County which was dotted with large factories of mostly metal works. He may have represented local Italian fruit growers in the Italian markets at the Front Street section of Hartford, as well as the larger marketplaces of New York and Boston.²²

In 1895, Gino's uncle, Corrado Liserani Trevisani had also journeyed to America from Florence, and made residence in Chicago. As a merchant, he voyaged to America frequently and may have been enticed by Gino's father to reside in Chicago, though a year later he was living in St. Louis. Carlo probably joined his brother a few years after, setting up a women's clothing business which ultimately went bankrupt. In 1904, Carlo Liserani again traveled from Italy and indicated in ship's logs that his final destination was St. Louis, Missouri to meet his brother. As this was two months before the opening of the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904, one could surmise that given his previous work, this would be in some connection with the fair's Italian Pavilion. While there the brothers would have witnessed the construction of Union Station which was expanded to be the largest train station in the country to anticipate visitors to the fair. Many of these seasonal immigrant workers who toiled on Union Station were from southern Italy—most being recently-arrived Sicilians who numerically altered a city that had been, prior to 1900, the largest Milanese community outside of Lombardy. Possibly, it was here with all the

²² Ralph Fierro, "The Evolution of Ethnicity: Connecticut's Italians, 1900-1940" (Phd Diss. University of Connecticut, 2000), 48;53.

employment making fast money that the brothers, having recently had a few financial setbacks, got the idea of being middlemen for the railroads.²³

As for Gino, he and his youngest brother, also named Corrado, would be sent back to Florence to stay with their grandparents. Keeping with a family tradition in which at least one member of the family would serve the church, the obedient son was chosen by his family to join the priesthood. As a result, at an early age Gino was sent to Strada in Casentino, a local Jesuit seminary.

Thirty miles from Florence, the medieval ecclesiastical Tuscan village of Strada in Casentino, with its picturesque wooded hills, castles and encircling walls may have been the setting where Gino received his first training in the arts, since drama was traditionally taught in the Jesuit education system. Craftsmanship is what Tuscany was renowned for, and Strada in Casentino had a quarry and stone carving industry, with methods of sculpting dating to ancient times.²⁴ If nothing else, the environment would have inspired a young boy to have a solid appreciation of art. One of his tutors, apparently an illegitimate son of opera star Enrico Caruso who would travel back and forth to New York for business, may have also taught him a love of music and familiarized him with urban America.²⁵

²³ Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 20; 56.

²⁴ Strada in Casentino is still proud of its unique stone carving heritage, and celebrates with a yearly sculpture exhibition that highlights local artists and ancient carving techniques.

²⁵ Gino Corrado, interviewed by Bill Cappello, Van Nuys, CA, 4 May 1976. Tape 1.

At the age of fifteen, the future actor returned to the United States, accompanied by his uncle Corrado and his wife Emma—Gino’s aunt. The family entered Ellis Island and quickly made their way to Chicago, where the rest of the Liserani family was living. Generally, immigration to America and contact with different dialects and customs only exasperated regional biases and distinctions for many Italians, and settlement was generally by region. This area in Chicago known as the Near North was just south of the “Little Sicily” section and was populated with Tuscans who worked as mainly shopkeepers and fruit peddlers. Those from Lucca—nearer to 637 North Clark where the Liserani family lived and indicative of Gino’s environment—worked mainly as plaster workers in the neighborhood statuary shops.²⁶

Young Gino, however, would continue his training for the priesthood, and was enrolled in St. Bede College, a Benedictine Catholic seminary boarding school in Peru, Illinois, about 50 miles outside of Chicago. He was listed as Gino Liserani in the registrar of students in the 1908 academic year. Since Gino apparently entered the school in mid-semester, his grades were never recorded, but it is indicated that Gino focused on Latin and Greek, and won an award: “Distinction in Vocal Music.” The 1908 school catalog describes its goals in its training: “It is the ambition of the College to send forth young

²⁶ Vecoli, “Chicago Italians Prior to World War I,” 165, 169-170. According to Vecoli, who cites the *History of the Lower North Side*, Documents 27, 36, and 61, the Tuscan neighborhood was formed principally along Franklin, Wells, and Orleans Streets, between Grand Avenue and Chicago Avenue. Slightly northeast was the Luccesi neighborhood whose epicenter was Division and Clybourne. Thomas Guglielmo writes that by World War I there was almost two dozen Italian immigrant communities with the River Wards the most populous, followed by the Near Northside which had a population of 13,000. See *White on Arrival Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8,16. The Liserani address of 637 N. Clark Street became 1526 N. Clark when the streets were renumbered according to the *Plan of Re-Numbering, City of Chicago* (August 1909).

men educated in the fullest sense of the word: pure, sober, industrious, self-respecting men—men of well-formed habits, fearless in the defense of honor, truth, justice, loyal to Country, Church, and God.”²⁷

In a short publicity piece that Gino made as an actor several decades later, he claims that he was dis-enrolled from St. Bede when Gino’s father purchased a vaudeville house in Chicago, the \$100 semester tuition became too much of a burden, and the youth withdrew from school.²⁸

Besides his investment in vaudeville, Gino’s father may have also become a partner in another firm, that of his brother, as Corrado Trevisani had become a Chicago “padrone”—a labor boss—and opened an agency. In 1907, Gino’s uncle opened shop in “Little Italy” as it was known, at 384 N. Clark Street and one year later made a jump to a more prime location at 101 South Canal Street (to partner with an individual named Clarence B. Shaffner); and in 1909, he was the sole agent at 30 South Canal. Soon after, Trevisani was a partner with Gino’s father. Since Gino may have been sent to seminary with a loan from his uncle who was already well-established in Chicago, the needed capital for the startup operation may be one explanation for Gino’s removal from his school.²⁹

²⁷ St. Bede College catalog for the 1907-1908 school year, 88. St. Bede Academy, Peru, Illinois. Thanks to Friar Ronald Margherio for this information.

²⁸ O’Maley, three-page studio publicity for Gino Corrado, circa 1928. GCC.

²⁹ Ibid. No evidence has been found in Gino Corrado’s papers, directories, or in any archives of such a theater that the family purchased. Considering the tendency to craft stories in publicity, is the story about the vaudeville theater plausible?

Many *padroni* (the plural form of *padrone*) were from urban northern Italy and felt culturally superior to rural southern Italians. Most *padroni* were unlicensed, but were bilingual and connected with American employers. These labor bosses sent Italian immigrants to all regions of the United States. *Padroni* often encouraged Italians to seek employment with their agency in America through letters and advertisements, or sometimes they sent representatives to meet immigrants right off the boat. Others partnered with steamship operators and recruit labor in Italian villages. Thus the *padroni* played a major part in encouraging immigration and were skilled at getting through customs and settling the newly-arrived. Gino said of his father's profession: "the Italians—the mafia—used to go to his office and lay a thousand dollars on his desk, [and] say, 'Gio Carlo, I want my sister-in-law in the next shipment coming from Italy' or 'my brother-in-law' or so and so..."³⁰

Carlo Liserani left the business after a couple years once his family arrived. Gino later claimed, "My father gave up his...eh... *diplomatic work*."³¹ Corrado Trevisani, however, stayed on for another few years and seems to have made a sizeable income.³² Chicago became the ultimate *padroni* center due to geographical location and being a railroad hub. As labor agents and often intermediaries for Italian muscle for the railroads and other industries, *padrones* had the opportunity to make a handsome profit from non-

³⁰ Gino Corrado interviewed by Bill Cappello, Van Nuys, CA, 4 May 1976. Tape 1.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Carlo Trevisani was briefly mentioned in a strange newspaper article (about a mistaken identity) in 1907 as a laborer. Only a few years later, he was living on Lake Shore Drive, one of the more affluent areas of the city. It is likely that his *padrone* position contributed to his quick amassing of wealth.

union labor. The Italian-language Chicago newspaper *La Parola dei Socialisti* decried the use of such anti-union tactics to exploit cheap labor, and painted a portrait of the padrone's devices in setting up shop:

Then at the counter, one awaits prey at leisure. He has previously corresponded with some company that is building a railroad line, a bridge, a tunnel, or an aqueduct and wants laborers shipped to some distant solitary place, to be supervised by slave-driving bosses, far from the surveillance of the law... Our poor countrymen usually congregate in groups of five, six, ten, twenty, or fifty... He makes them believe that he has rejected two or three hundred Slavs or Greeks in order to reserve the good jobs for the Italians.³³

At least one instance of a padrone's swindling brought retribution from his victims. One such was an Americanized Italian that allegedly collected a fee of one dollar from each Italian needing work by promising jobs on the Grand Trunk Railroad, but failed to deliver. Spotted enjoying a picture show in Chicago (presumably, thanks to their hard-earned money), upon his exit of the theater he was beaten by a waiting mob of forty Italians.³⁴ In a business often considered to be unethical, it is not known whether Corrado Trevisani's motives or ethics went beyond monetary. However, his employment business was highly visible with his name listed in the business section of the city directory—one of the very few Italians to do so. Interestingly, while he moved workers to distant sites and across borders, he also moved family members.

One letter indicates Gino's youngest brother, Corrado, was still in Italy at the age of ten. Gino, who played the violin himself, was concerned with his younger brother's

³³ *La Parola dei Socialisti* 12 March, 1908; Chicago Foreign Press Survey, Box 27 Series II (Contributions and Activities: Employment Agencies).

³⁴ "Alleged Swindler Beaten by Italians," *Chicago Daily Tribune*. 27 February, 1907, 3. The padrone who narrowly escaped death was Louis A. Grego.

violin lessons. The future actor's parents had left the boy with his grandparents. In a postcard dated April 10, 1909, Gino's brother wrote:

Dear Gino,
I awaited your news and received nothing. But I hope that your health is good. I am well and so are the grand-parents especially now given the better weather. However, we underwent a tremendous winter. I assure you, however, that I remained in perfect health throughout. My violin playing is proceeding adequately. Farewell and a big embrace
Your brother,
Corrado

Write soon.³⁵

When his grandmother died on March 26, 1910 the boy may have been a burden to his uncle and elderly grandfather. Tragedy befell Gino when his twelve-year-old brother died January 2, 1911 in Italy. In a somber letter dated shortly after the boy's death (January 18), Gino's uncle Corrado Trevisani wrote to his brother Carlo:

My words are insufficient to express to you our great sorrow for the unexpected news of the death of your poor Corrado. Two months have gone by since we left him in Italy in good health, and never would we have conceived of a similar catastrophe... Emma and I weep with you over the loss of little Corrado, and in this moment of irreparable grief, we send you our most sincere condolences. I am immensely saddened in thinking that you attribute this fatality to my having advised that the boy be sent to boarding school, and I wish to explain everything to you, so that you may consider and verify all that I write to you. First of all, you need to know that the moment Emma and I arrived in Italy, father was of the opinion that upon return we should take the boy with us. I told him that I would do all that you required but that other than that I would not take the responsibility. Then we received your letter in which you requested that we should absolutely not send the boy to America. Father replied to you indicating that due to his advanced age and certain other concerns, he could in no way take care of the boy, and that if you did not want him that he would send him to an institution. We saw your response where you authorized him to do so. Our sisters and I wished to keep the boy in the house, but the house-keeper took offense and threatened to

³⁵ Corrado Liserani to "Master Gino Liserani," Postcard dated April 8, 1909 sent from Italy to Chicago, GCC.

terminate her service if the boy remained...during the three months that I was home I had to swallow much to the point that finally in tears I told father that I regretted having come to Italy and that I could not wait to leave again. And all this because of that dirty house-keeper gallivanting about.³⁶

Why the boy was kept in Italy is unknown. Reasons could be that he was being sent, like Gino, to a seminary school. Perhaps, while the family moved west across the country from New York to Chicago and beyond, the young boy would have been a financial burden. Sending an American-born child to live with grandparents in Italy was common with Italian immigrants, coined by one Italian travel writer as “birds of passage” for their multiple or temporary or seasonal stays. Families frequently planned on reuniting in the homeland after working and saving for a few years in America.³⁷ Perhaps a mental illness or physical malady kept him in Italy and led to the boy’s death. Soon after the tragedy, Gino’s father traveled to San Bernardino, and his mother, and his remaining brothers, went to Los Angeles.³⁸

³⁶ Correspondence from Corrado Trevisani addressed to Carlo [Liserani] dated 18 January 1911, GCC.

³⁷ Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 48-49.

³⁸ United States Population Census records for San Bernardino County, 1910 and Los Angeles County, 1910.



Figure 1. Photographs of Corrado Liserani and his gravesite.

When he learned of his brother's death, Gino, was living in a boarding house in San Francisco in the heart of the North Shore Italian district.³⁹ The duration of his stay in San Francisco is unknown, but a postcard dated 1912 was mailed and was apparently received by him at the "Belmont School, Belmont, California," where presumably his parents sent him to continue his education.⁴⁰ The Belmont School for Boys, located thirty

³⁹ United States Population Census records for San Francisco, 1910.

⁴⁰ Postcard addressed to "Master Gino Liserani" at the Belmont School, postmarked November 1912, GCC. There are no existing Belmont school records for this year.

miles south of San Francisco, was an expensive (\$800 per year) military boarding school started by a former president of the University of California that was modeled after England's Eton School. Prestigious and exclusive, Belmont School guaranteed its graduates acceptance into a prestigious college.⁴¹ Unlike Chicago's weather and topography, Belmont's Mediterranean climate would have made Gino feel more at home. In fact, an article written about the area in *Sunset* magazine boasted that: "These hills furnish residence sites of charming beauty and a vista of valley, bay and far distant mountains which even Italy cannot surpass."⁴² Several Italians had become wealthy in San Francisco and had moved into the vicinity and made residence in adjacent San Mateo such as Amadeo P. Giannini (founder of Bank of Italy—later to become Bank of America, the world's largest by 1945).⁴³

Compared to Italians in the east, California's northern Italian population was much more successful. Still, when Gino once again abruptly left school, according to later studio publicity, he then worked in the unlikely occupation of loading bananas. Even his publicity mentions the irony: "So from the study of Latin and Greek, Gino went to unloading bananas from trucks..."⁴⁴ This laborious feat required heavy lifting and rapidly moving the perishable fruit to transport sheds or the marketplace. The stalk of the banana

⁴¹ Ria Elena Dewing, *Heritage of the Wooded Hills: A Belmont History* (San Mateo, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1977), 29-31. William T. Reid, formerly a president of the University of California opened the school, which in 1893 merged with the Hopkins Academy, formerly of Oakland.

⁴² Charles Howard Shinn, "Down the San Mateo Peninsula," *Sunset Magazine*, August 1902, 278.

⁴³ Felice A. Bonadio, *A.P. Giannini: Banker of America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 3-7.

⁴⁴ Agnes O'Malley, "Gino Corrado Biography."1.

plant had branches called stems, each stem had several bunches to be later cut up into hands containing about twenty fruits, or “fingers.” Bananas were shipped by the bunch, with two-hundred fingers often weighing as much as eighty pounds carried by a man.⁴⁵ It is hard to believe that with his status, Gino would have partaken in such strenuous work, but photographs of him in his youth do show muscles that attest to intense physical activity.⁴⁶

Angelo Galli and Lorenzo Scatena, both born in Lucca, were two of the major established produce dealers in San Francisco. As regional rivalries arose between commissioners—often from Genoa—and nearby farmers, Scatena found success by extending loans to Italian growers in the nearby Santa Clara Valley thus laying the foundations for the immigrant banking system. Scatena was also the step-father of A.P. Giannini.⁴⁷ With San Francisco being the main shipping port for the west coast at the time, and the fruit trade in the city monopolized by Northern Italians, particularly Tuscans, it would have been a likely place that Gino, fresh out of school, could have found his first job. However, his later publicity would claim, “bunions on his shoulders and hands,” had convinced him he was ready for some other kind of work.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Dan Koeppel, *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2008), 12-13.

⁴⁶ One such photo shows young Gino flexing his back muscles. GCC.

⁴⁷ Ibid, see also Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 218.

⁴⁸ Another produce dealer from Pisa, Tuscany was Gino Sbrana. See Carlos Bowden, Jr., *Italians of the Bay Area: The Photographs of Gino Sbrana* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2006), 9.

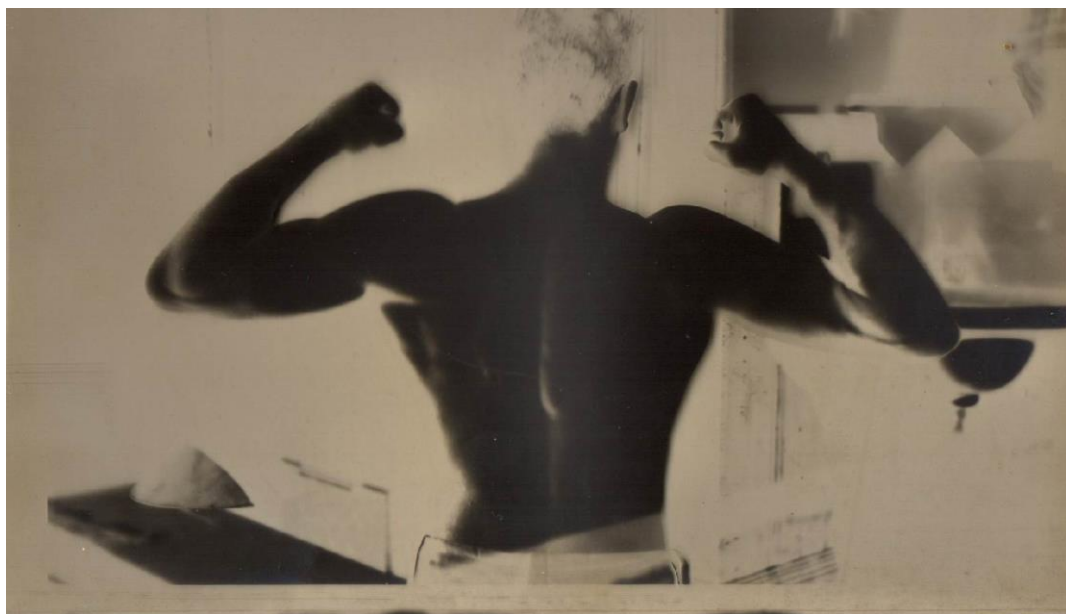


Figure 2. Photographic negative of Gino Corrado Liserani, circa 1910.

CHAPTER TWO

FOLLOWING THE DRAMATIC ARTS:

THE ITALIAN THEATER AND THE NICKELODEON BOOM

The Italians in their two thousand years of history, have got into the habit of being invaded. To them it is unimportant, and anyways they always end by defeating the invaders. Politically submitting to her conquerors, Italy in practice converts them to her own way of life. Her artists and architects, her builders and cabinet makers invade the conquerors' territory not with cannon-fire but with works of art and daily use.
Jean Renoir.¹

This Italian immigrant happened upon the most glamorous American profession. But when and why did Gino Corrado become fascinated with film? Unlike some cultures that had little esteem for actors and the acting profession, Italians had a strong tradition in theater-going dating back to the Roman era and beyond. The legitimate theater could trace its roots to ancient Rome and before that to ancient Greece. The Greek circular open amphitheater was co-opted and modified by the Romans. The Roman theatre was an auditorium, but instead of a complete circle, was cut in half and usually contained a stage, orchestra floor, and an ornate back wall, all in effect a direct ancestor to America's theater architecture.²

¹ Jean Renoir, *My Life and My Films* (New York: Antheneum, 1974), 179-180.

² Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 909.

In the Renaissance era, the best acting troupes were supported by wealthy patrons of the arts in whose courts they performed. Perhaps an indicator of the status of actors, Florence's Medici family was known to actively recruit actors by raiding talent from already existing theater groups. When acting troupes began to assert their independence by depending on the public rather than the feudalistic courts, they opted for indoor theatres over outside auditoriums or street performances—it was easier to collect money this way. One of the first of these paying theatres in all of Europe was the Teatro di Baldracca in Florence.³

In nineteenth-century America, Italian American immigrants could boast of Italian-language theaters in the largest cities including several in the heart of New York's Bowery section. New York was the cultural center for Italian immigrants. Several actors from the city became popular in the vaudeville circuit such as comedian and lyricist Eduardo Migliaccio, who used the stage name Farfariello and drew upon traditional Neapolitan comedy and played multiple characters found in Little Italy including a sketch of a Southern Italian dialect-speaking character who was a well-meaning country bumpkin fresh off the boat, similar in pantomime style to Chaplin's Little Tramp.⁴ In the process of his popular act that drew a diverse audience of Italians of different classes, regions, and ages (including children), he addressed in song and monologue that was

³ Siro Ferrone, *The Traveling Invention: Italian Actors between 1580 and 1630* (London: University College London, Center for Italian Studies, Occasional Papers 5, 2000), 11. See also Robert Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Comedie dell'Arte* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16

⁴ Francesco Cordasco, *The Italians: Social Backgrounds of an American Group* (Clifton, NJ: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1974), 146-148.

spoken or sung in the immigrant idiom of dialect, standard Italian, and Italianized English, the awkwardness of the Italian immigrant in navigating “the tower of Babel” that was a multilingual New York City.⁵

Several cities in which the Liserani family lived provided ample opportunities to view Italian theater. The Liserani family probably witnessed Italian theater, be it Commedia dell Arte or Vaudeville variety shows, in many of the cities in which they lived, including Hartford (where Gino’s younger brother Lorenzo was born).

Italy had several celebrated dramatic actors that achieved a high level of success in America as early as the 1870s. Florence was home to some of Italy’s greatest actors, the most famous of these was Tommaso Salvini, a Shakespearian actor who had several successful tours of America beginning in 1873. By the 1880s, Salvini’s son, Alessandro, also successfully toured the United States.

Later in Gino Corrado’s acting career, he sought to connect his image to that of the Italian legitimate stage tradition; Hollywood publicists claimed that Corrado apprenticed himself to Salvini as a child in Italy. Tommaso Salvini died in 1915, and Gino’s apprenticeship is remotely possible, but doubtful, considering Gino came to America in 1908. Salvini, himself no stranger to the publicity machine, may not have frowned on such an attempt by a screen actor to link himself with one of Italy’s most venerated thespians. In fact, Salvini was well known to whip up enthusiasm while touring by using an overwhelming publicity campaign which distributed, as his nephew described,

⁵ Nancy C. Carnevale, *A New Language, A New World: Italian Immigrants in the United States, 1890-1945* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 116-120.

“thousands of biographies everywhere, in the hotels, in the theatres, in all public places, scattered along the thoroughfare by huge coaches—biographies each one different from the next, containing the most arbitrary and fantastic things, and truthful in nothing except Salvini’s name.”⁶

News of these Salvini tours were carried in American newspapers in large cities and well-known to the theatre-going public. Corrado’s parents and relatives were most likely fans. They may have seen him perform when Alexander Salvini gave a group of dramas, mostly for Italian audiences in Chicago at the Grand Theater.

In 1907, Ermete Novelli, a Shakespearian dramatist that the *Chicago Daily Tribune* ranked as Italy’s second best (after actress Eleanora Duse) visited Chicago. His arrival was emphatically awaited and would not have gone unnoticed by Corrado’s family living there at the time. Novelli depended on his ex-pats to fill the seats of the auditoriums at his performances. He selected a play only known to Italians because he competed with Ethel Barrymore at another theater the same night. At a previous show in New York (the world’s fourth largest Italian-speaking city at the time) the resident Italians, from consul to organ-grinder, reportedly packed the theater.⁷

When Corrado arrived in Chicago there was an array of plays in more foreign languages than any other city in America, with the possible exception of New York. Outside Chicago’s loop (center district) and beyond their glamorous theatres, lying in the

⁶ Marvin Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians: Performances by Ristori, Salvini, and Rossi in England and America* (Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985), 49.

⁷ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 March, 1907, 11.

heart of the ethnic neighborhoods, were theaters scarcely more than a hall with a fashioned stage, where working immigrants could see a dramatic presentation. Often packed houses, these ethnic plays were spoken in not just Italian or related dialects, but Greek, Russian, Yiddish, Polish, Czech, German, Swedish, and even Chinese and Japanese.⁸

Despite Italian theatrical productions being enthusiastically received, these plays seemed to lack permanent venues, with the exception of those performances at Hull-House—a settlement set up by social workers Jane Addams, perhaps the most famous activist female of the early 20th century (she later won the Nobel Peace Prize), and Ellen Gates Starr. Hull-House was located on Chicago's West Side which was originally an area where northern Italians from Tuscany and Genoa resided. The neighborhood was the destination of southern Italians. One of the many northern Italian families to gradually move from there to the near North Side was Corrado's.⁹

Hull-House was the first organization in America to provide residents with citizenship classes. Hull-House provided Chicago with several of the city's firsts, including the first public playground, public gymnasium, and college extension classes.

⁸ "Chicago Has More Foreign Theaters than Any Other City In the World," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 31, 1908, E18. See also Diane M. Pinderhughes, *Race and Ethnicity in Chicago Politics: A Reexamination of Pluralist Theory*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987, 81. Pinderhughes writes: "Chicago had perhaps the most racially and ethnically heterogeneous population of an American city in the early twentieth century."

⁹ Rivka Shpak Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890-1919* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 95.

Perhaps more relevant to Corrado's story, Addams and Starr who were major supporters of the arts, opened the first community theater in the United States.¹⁰

Hull-House Theatre had a capacity of two-hundred-and-thirty, and included an inclined floor and opera seats. The facility was open to any ethnic group in the neighborhood, but was strongly utilized by the area's southern Italians. Some of these plays dealt with the Italian experience in America, illustrated by the title of one such production, *I Figli Dell' Emigato* (The Son of the Immigrant), about the disrespectful break between Americanized children and Old Country parents.¹¹

The Dante Alighieri Society sponsored several plays at the Hull-House.¹² Named after Dante Alighieri, the poet of Florence that inspired the formation of a common national language, the society was an Italian nationalist literary club, founded in 1889 for the purpose of spreading Italian culture and language. In an era of massive emigration the society also protected Italians in foreign countries.¹³ Other Italian plays were staged by Italian clubs such as the Unione Siciliana. In 1907, a new Italian society was formed—the Firenze Society—and principally composed of Italians from Florence. The inauguration of its incorporation was at Turner Hall on the North Side with a play

¹⁰ Robin K. Bernson, *Jane Addams: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), 34. Corrado may have also been attracted to Hull-House's art galleries and Ellen Gates Starr's occasional lectures on Florentine artists.

¹¹ Stuart Joel Hecht, *Hull-House Theatre: An Analytical and Evaluative History* (PhD Dissertation. Northwestern University, Evanston, I, 1983), 30-36. See also Andrew E. Barnicle, "The Origins of Theatre at Hull-House, 1896-1912" (MA Thesis, University of Chicago, 1978). 54.

¹² Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives*, 97.

¹³ *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 17 May, 1913; Chicago Foreign Press Survey, Box 27.

that was followed by a dance that lasted until 4 AM.¹⁴ Some of Corrado's family were involved in both the Dante Alighieri Society and Firenze Society, and probably attended functions such as these, and may have inspired young Corrado.

However, another possibility is that Corrado may not have partaken in many of the activities over at Hull-House for a variety of reasons. Primarily, Hull-House began to upset many Catholic leaders for its association with some controversial groups that used the facilities for meetings. The anti-clerical Giordano Bruno Club (named after a sixteenth century Italian philosopher that was executed during the Inquisition) was found particularly offensive. Hull-House later cut its ties to this group, due in part to Addams' reluctance to support the club's political aims, but not before a debate raged in the church over Hull-House activities, with church newspapers reporting that Hull-House was a focal point of radical groups.¹⁵

In contrast to Corrado's family and to many immigrants from Italy, some Tuscans were fiercely anti-religious. One Florentine, Giuseppe Bertelli, was a socialist who immigrated for political reasons after being imprisoned in Italy for activism, and in 1908 had formed an Italian language paper in Chicago titled *La Parola Dei Socialisti*. Once expelled from Hull-House, the newspaper reported that the Bruno Club had secured a vaudeville house at 379 Halsted Street (just a few buildings from Hull-House at 335 Halsted), showing a series of Italian comedies and movies, along with ballads and

¹⁴ *L'Italia* 5 January, 1907; Chicago Foreign Press Survey, Box 27. Even earlier, *La Tribuna Italiana* 6 November, 1904 also reports of Italian theater in Chicago with the Dante Alighieri Society mentioned.

¹⁵ Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives*, 98.

songs—all for a nickel. The location was probably deliberate, as were some of the theatrical impersonations, in order to prove that “the public applauds particularly when (and it happens often) priests, bosses, and exploiters are attacked on stage.”¹⁶

Another debate raged over moving pictures in Chicago and their effects in promoting juvenile delinquency in youth. Chicago social worker Gertrude Howe Britton, a reformer whose work dealt with protecting children from crime, initiated the idea of converting the theatre at Hull-House into a five cent movie house, employing the tactics of the cheap nickelodeons complete with a barker to coax people in off the street, posters, and a large electric sign. As a reaction to the fare of most nickelodeons, the theatre at Hull-House (renamed by Jane Addams as the Reform Five-Cent Motion Picture Theatre) would show “clean” pictures.¹⁷ The idea was enthusiastically supported by several clergymen and two moving picture company executives, Carl Laemmle, who loaned Hull-House several films from his Chicago exchange business, and William Selig, who donated a lantern for moving pictures.

Laemmle later capitalized on the venture with a company advertisement in trade magazines, illustrating Addams, the famous reformer, above an image of a letter signed by her that endorsed motion pictures and hoping they be used “for all purposes of education and entertainment and that schools and churches will count the films as among their most valuable equipment.”¹⁸ Both Laemmle and Selig started out in the vaudeville

¹⁶ “Vaudeville Theatre” *La Parola dei Socialisti* 20 June, 1908; Chicago Foreign Press Survey, Box 27.

¹⁷ *Film Index* 8 June, 1907, 7.

¹⁸ *Film Index* 10 August, 1907, 10.

and nickelodeon business, went into the film exchange end, and finally, and finally operated their own movie studios.¹⁹ (Laemmle later started Universal Studios in Los Angeles; Selig built a studio in San Diego and also the first permanent film studio in Hollywood.) The Hull-House theater experiment lasted only two weeks, and was discontinued because of exceedingly hot weather (in an era prior to air conditioning), but only after it was proven that films could be instructive to youth and immigrants.²⁰

Well before the work of casting became a science in the industry, American motion picture magazines often ran articles that highlighted the differences between motion picture acting and that of the stage, and how to properly cast actors for work in front of the camera. In 1907, *Film Index* magazine claimed that the best film actors and actresses came not from the ranks of American and English theater professionals, but rather from the Latin race, particularly French and Italian. The explanation was “the Anglo Saxon was more phlegmatic” and lacked “required lively action.”²¹

Even while Corrado was in Italy, he would have already been familiar with moving pictures, for over 500 theaters were in operation in Italy in 1907, the year before his voyage back to America. In an attempt to compete with French companies, Florence in particular was selected by the Edison Company as an influential art center and housed

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Hull-House Yearbook* 1906-1907, 39. Hull-House Association Collection, University of Illinois, Chicago. Jane Addams wanted to develop movies as a municipal institution. See Lary May, *Screening out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 53.

²¹ *Film Index*, 27 July, 1907, 4. The article may have been aimed at exhibitors, in anticipation of foreign films’ (Pathe etc.) dominance of the market.

the first theater in Italy to be inaugurated to exclusively show motion pictures.²² The theater was operated by Rodolfo Remondini who was Florence's main exhibitor, and in the years that Gino was living in Italy, Remondini had a movie studio in Florence and had released mostly short historical pieces or news items such as King Umberto's visit to Pisa or the unveiling of a new commemorative statue in Rome sculpted by Florence's own Raffaello Romanelli.²³ Florence embraced the seventh art and boasted cinema pioneer Filoteo Alberini who, only nine months after the French pioneers Lumière brothers and four years after Edison, invented an early motion picture camera, projector, and printer (an all-in-one unit) in 1895 called the Kinotografo Alberini. Alberini started a studio and subsequently released Italy's first epic in 1904. His company would be merged into Cines in Rome which would later become Italy's largest studio.²⁴ The more industrialized Rome, Turin, and Milan soon surpassed Florence in film output, with Rome ultimately becoming Italy's film epicenter.

Being a member of an immigrant ethnic group in America may have further encouraged Corrado's initial interest in film as an early teen. Indeed, at the turn of the century, young people were obsessed with "the flickers." Nearly a fourth of nickelodeon picture show patrons in the years 1907-1910 were children, and because the shows did

²² Fabio Chiantini and Andrea Vanini. *Cinema to Grafica: Il Stampato a Firenze e in Toscana*. (Florence, Italy: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, 1995), 15. Films were shown previously in Italy in concert houses and cabarets as early as 1897.

²³ Aldo Bernardini, *Cinema Muto Italiano, I film "dal vero" 1895-1914* (La Cineteca da Friuli, 2002), 43. The monument of Carlo Alberto by Romanelli was inaugurated on 14 March 1900, with the film of the event exhibited at the Sala Firenze 24 July.

²⁴ Bernardini, *Cinema Muto Italiano*, 10-11. Giorgio Bertellini, "Alberini, Filoteo," in Richard Abel (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 16.

not require translation (they had music and no inter-titles), many in the audience were recent immigrants. Adding to this “foreign-ness” of the American theater-going experience in this period, many of the films for the American market were produced by Pathé Films, a French company.²⁵ For three years, 1905 to 1908, Pathé films dominated the American nickelodeon market. In 1908, sixty percent of the total film circulated in the United States was Pathé’s.²⁶

Barring the semester spent at school, Corrado’s time in Chicago would have put him in a prime neighborhood for nickelodeons. These small theaters were located primarily where immigrants lived but also where they worked. The North Clark Street neighborhood was exactly this with its foot traffic and mixed residences above storefronts. In fact, in 1909 the Juvenile Protection Agency counted seven theaters on a one-mile stretch of Clark around where Corrado lived.²⁷ Additionally, a few film exchanges (where the exhibitor could rent film) were located along Clark. Frequenting the nickelodeon arcades to view the picture shows would have been a ritual when Corrado was a teenage boy in Chicago. One hundred thousand people patronized the 100 to 150 “electric

²⁵ Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 119.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 48-49.

²⁷ Julie Ann Lindstrom, “Getting A Hold Deeper in the Life of the City: Chicago Nickelodeons, 1905-1914,” (PhD. Diss., Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 1998), 200. Lindstrom claims that “motion pictures played a substantial role in the entertainment life of the area.” The seven theaters were located on Clark between the river and Chicago Avenue.

theaters” every day in Chicago in 1906.²⁸ By 1908 the number of Chicago theaters increased to 300.²⁹

Besides the nickelodeons, a general expansion of popularly-priced amusements included vaudeville theaters.³⁰ Many legitimate theaters were remodeled as vaudeville houses, for a program of five to seven daily shows that lasted an hour to an hour-and-a-half, and an admission price of five or ten cents. The vaudeville variety shows were popular with America’s Italian immigrant communities since the late nineteenth century, and if Corrado’s father purchased a vaudeville theater in 1908, as Corrado’s later publicity piece claimed, the nickelodeon boom would not have gone unnoticed. This may be especially true since Corrado’s father also lived in the Coney Island section of New York City in the late 1890s and he and his brother Cyrus would have experienced the limitless possibilities of new amusements that utilized technology and showmanship.

The popularity of moving pictures may have had a direct impact on Corrado’s father’s business. In 1910, Chicago’s *The Nickelodeon* magazine reported that “the regular vaudeville houses have steadily declined in number since the moving picture show grew popular, until there are hundreds of good vaudeville actors seeking engagements, [this] shows conclusively that the people prefer pictures to variety.”³¹ Gino was reportedly pulled from school so his father could start up a vaudeville theater; the

²⁸ Abel, *Red Rooster Scare*, 50.

²⁹ Ibid. 64.

³⁰ Robert C. Allen, *Vaudeville and Film, 1895-1915: A study in Media Interaction* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 203.

³¹ *The Nickelodeon* 15 February, 1910 (Vol. II, No. 5). 134.

cost of one good vaudeville show was less than \$75 a week. Some vaudeville houses had converted to, or had exhibited, moving pictures. Whether Gino's father showed films or stuck to a more traditional stage show is unknown, and it may be an irony that the father's vaudeville career could have come to a close in only a year or two, in some way because of the advent of motion pictures.

By 1910, American studios were competing with Pathè for dominance of the American market. In particular, two east coast firms, Vitagraph and Biograph, posed a challenge to Pathé. Chicago, too, had prominence in the industry due to Essanay Picture Studio and the city's location as a film distribution center. Opening in 1907 and located at 425 North Clark Street, Essanay produced several popular westerns including the popular Bronco Billy series. The studio must have captured Corrado's attention as a youth since it was located just a few short blocks from his home.³² In time, Corrado relocated from one early center of film, Chicago, and move into another.

Both the 1910 U.S. census records and Corrado's correspondence show that by the time he was seventeen, his family had moved west. The census reports Corrado's father (listed as Carlo Liserani) living alone in San Bernardino, California, temporarily working as a boardinghouse keeper, with only one other lodger, another Italian who was a restaurant worker. Though the Southern Pacific railroad was San Bernardino's largest employer (employing 85 percent of its residents), the local citrus industry as California's

³² Postcard, postmarked 25 February, 1908 from Italy to Mr. Gino Liserani, at "637 N. Clark St., Chicago," GCC.

principal agricultural product was booming.³³ The town had a history of citrus cultivation being traced to the area's most extensive orchard having been planted by Franciscan priests during the Spanish missionary period a hundred years earlier, as well as citrus cultivators in the town creating several hybrid oranges in the twentieth century though lesser known than neighboring Riverside where the popular Washington Navel had been developed. The inland town which was the county seat was also the nation's largest county in geographical size, and was the center of the citrus belt empire (Pasadena to Riverside), producing the largest portion of the state's oranges of any county.

The nation of Italy ranked third in production of citrus (Spain ranking second), and Italians had some familiarity and knowledge of the fruit. These immigrants occasionally worked as laborers or as foremen running the crews of Mexicans with whom they could communicate, or as bosses of the Chinese, who also had some tradition and familiarity with citrus as many varieties of oranges actually originated in the orient.³⁴ One citrus fruit with which Italy's growers had enjoyed a monopoly was lemons, dominating the industry in Europe as well as America (where, for instance, nearly the entire lemon trade in New York City was controlled by Italians who imported from the Old Country). Italy was increasingly challenged with tariff policies and by the lobbying efforts of the Citrus Protective League of California against foreign imports that had, by 1911,

³³ Julia G. Costello and Kevin Hallaran, *The Luck of Third Street: Historical Archaeology in Chinatown, San Bernardino, California*. (California Department of Transportation, District 8, 2004). Section. 2.12. "By 1900, fully 85 percent of the city's population was directly employed by the railroad; in 1940, 25 percent of the city's 40,000 residents were employed by the Santa Fe Railroad (Donaldson 1991:3)."

³⁴ Matt García, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 51. See also B.M. Long, *Culture of the Citrus in California* (Sacramento: California State Department of Agriculture, 1900), 63.

established a lemon industry that could supply America with one-half its lemons.³⁵ The booming citrus industry in Southern California had made the 60-mile citrus belt's satellite cities like Pasadena wealthy. Riverside, for instance, once had the highest per-capita income in the United States in 1895, largely due to citrus.³⁶

Corrado's father may have first heard of the area at the fairs. The orange-producing counties in California had a strong presence in the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. He likely sampled the juicy oranges along with almost 250,000 fairgoers who were given a taste of citrus from the Golden State.³⁷ On his way east to California on the Southern Pacific railroad, he may have seen the booklets, maps, and posters distributed by the railroad company that boosted the state's largest county and subsequently took the popular Inside Track excursion line through the Orange Belt. Partnering with local chambers of commerce and county governments so as to increase commercial freight and to help sell their landholdings, Southern Pacific made the region alluring to recent immigrants by promoting the area's climate, farming, mining industry, gems, and ample water as the home of the largest artesian well in the nation. Also possible, Corrado's father might have first stepped into the town as part of the large public train tour organized by the San

³⁵Citrus Protection League, *Brief of Facts Related to the Citrus Industry: Presented to the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, Jan. 20, 1911*, 3-4.

³⁶ Pierre Laszlo, *Citrus: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 69-70.

³⁷ Douglas C. Sackman, "A Garden of Worldly Delights," in Greg Hise and William Deverell (eds.), *Land of Sunshine: The Environmental History of Greater Los Angeles* (University of Pittsburg Press, 2005), 253; García, *A World of Its Own*, 22. The Southern Pacific pamphlet, *The Inside Track: The Way Through the Wonderful Fruit and Flower Garden of Southern California* (1907) illustrates the path of the route from Los Angeles to Riverside.

Diego boosters for the proposed 1915 Panama-California exposition, which went through the orangebelt and included a half-hour stop in San Bernardino, the capital of a California county that the San Diego fair organizers sought to represent.³⁸

During the short time that Corrado's father was living in the inland community of San Bernardino, the city was preparing for the inauguration of the city's own major yearly fair that was set to debut in early March when the town would be flanked by the large orange groves, and framed by the scenic snow-capped peaks of the San Bernardino Mountains. Corrado's father, with his prior experience with world's fairs, and having been working as a painter, was probably connected to the ambitious civic undertaking of San Bernardino's National Orange Show Fair, as the exposition was named in 1911, with exhibits from all over the southwest that promoted and celebrated citrus production and technology and drew over 3,000 people.³⁹

Corrado, however, was in San Francisco in the North Beach section—an area where many Italians settled—and census records show him living in a boarding house, where almost everyone was Italian, including several opera singers and theatre agents.⁴⁰

³⁸ Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 157-160. *Desert Land to Fairyland: San Bernardino Valley Centennial Edition of The Evening Index* (1910), 13. Douglas C. Sackman, "A Garden of Worldly Delights," in Deverell and Hise (eds.), *Land of Sunshine*, 247. Tom Zimmerman, *Paradise Promoted: The Booster Campaign that Created Los Angeles 1870-1930* (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2008), 60-64. See also "Fair Boosters are Coming," *San Bernardino Daily Sun*, 8 January 1910, 5.

³⁹ *Official Souvenir Program, Eleventh National Orange Show, 1921*, 25; 39.

⁴⁰ United States Population Census records for San Francisco, 1910. Of the 25 other people boarding at this residence (not counting the apartment manager), four were involved in entertainment. This included two opera singers, a theatrical agent, and a theater manager. Of interest is that Gino Liserani is listed here as Gino Corrado. The San Francisco census was enumerated on May 7 and Corrado also shows up in the 1910 census, taken a few months later, for Los Angeles. Thus both census records show him in two locations as enumerators came to residences at different times.

He would head to Los Angeles and soon to San Diego to meet his family including his father.

Carlo was unofficially separated from Corrado's mother Caterina. He had listed himself as a widower in the 1910 census records. Possibly, the death of his youngest son created a rift in the family.⁴¹ In late 1912, the entire Liserani family resided in San Diego in two separate households, where the city directory listed Carlo as a painter, and Corrado's younger brother Luigi as a clerk. Of special interest is the occupation of nineteen-year-old "Eugene Liserani": waiter, a common occupation for young Italians. That job, certainly unbeknownst to Corrado at the time, would train him well for his future acting roles.⁴²

⁴¹ New York Passenger Lists mention the Stelka family arriving in New York in August 1911 and travelling to Milwaukee to meet a son (brother of Hermine).

⁴²United States Population Census records for San Bernardino County, 1910. Correspondence shows Corrado was lived in San Diego at several addresses, all in the Italian section: 1739 Front St., 1442 4th St., and 1200 Laurel. GCC. In the 1915 San Diego Directory, the Liserani had two separate households. In the 1917 San Diego Directory, Carlo and Catherine are living together, along with sons Corrado and Louis, at 825 27th street in San Diego. In the 1920 United States Federal Census, Louis was the head of household and lived with his mother and Lawrence in San Diego at 2138 Broadway.

CHAPTER THREE
CARVING OUT A NICHE:
CALIFORNIA'S FIRST FILM CENTER IN SAN DIEGO

By 1908, Corrado had received training at the seminary in art and sculpture. As a young adult, he went to Los Angeles to apprentice with a Florentine sculptor. Florence, Italy, was known for its sculpture. *Florentine Sculptors of the Renaissance*, a contemporary book on art history, extols the majesty of Corrado's home city, "In no branch of art had Florence so unqualified a claim as to pre-eminence as in sculpture... [B]y the thirteenth century Florence had taken up the lead; the sculpture of the Renaissance had its birth here, here it went through all the phases of development, and here finally, its transition to the baroque was prepared."¹

Corrado moved to the town of San Diego to work on the mansion of John D. Spreckels. A millionaire and heir to his father's sugar cane fortune, Spreckels commissioned much of the building on Coronado Island across the bay from San Diego. Corrado may have possibly done the fresco in the library building that was designed by Harrison Albright, an architect famous for his designs in the Italian Revival and Beaux Arts styles of architecture utilizing poured concrete.²

¹ William Bode, *Florentine Sculptors of the Renaissance*. Trans. By Jesse Haynes (London, UK: Methuen and Co. 1928).

² Cynthia Malinick, "Classicism and Concrete: Harrison Albright's Architectural Contribution to Coronado," *The Journal of San Diego History*, Volume 43, no. 2. (Spring 1997). Accessed online.

San Diego, with a population of only 40,000 in 1910, was planning a national fair which would make it the smallest city to take on such a venture. The event, which was a counterpart to the international San Francisco fair of the same year, was to be called the Panama-California Exposition and it would celebrate the discovery of the Pacific Ocean by Balboa and the recent engineering feat with the completion of the Panama Canal. Along with showcasing San Diego as the future port of the southwest (it was fiercely competing with Los Angeles and the new wharf at San Pedro), the fair would showcase agriculture, business, and industry in the city of San Diego—the closest port in California to the Canal—along with California counties. Eight Southern California counties had, with some opposition, called for completely separate buildings rather than a massive joint building with separate exhibits inside. The Director –General of the Exposition said “At the San Francisco exposition the people will not have time to see much more than the big foreign exhibits.” Speaking about San Diego, the director said, “We are honor bound to exclude such exhibits and are going to make it typically what the name indicates—a Panama-Pacific exposition.”³

In 1909 Spreckels was named vice president of the exposition committee. He soon chose New York architect Bertram Goodhue as the chief architect. Goodhue personally designed several of the buildings, including the Southern California Counties Building on which Corrado worked.⁴ The architecture was a departure from the Beaux

³ “San Diegans Win Support for Fair,” *San Diego Union*, 13 January 1912, 1.

⁴ Richard W. Amero, “The Making of the Panama-California Exposition, 1909-1915,” *The Journal of San Diego History*, 36, no. 1 (Winter 1990).

Arts or much-interpreted Baroque Classicism styles seen in other previous expositions. Instead, Spanish Colonial, Spanish Baroque, and Mediterranean Renaissance were adopted to emphasize more Early California and Southwestern themes. Several photographs that Corrado saved show him in work clothes on the scaffolding of the building. More than likely, his job was sculpting and installing the intricate facade pieces.⁵

“The First City of California,” as San Diego called itself at the time due to its initial mission settlement by the Spanish, included a small Italian population mostly from southern Italy who worked as fishermen since the 1880s.⁶ San Diego had recently experienced an influx of newly arrived. Genoese, some of which had originally immigrated to San Francisco due to the destructive 1902 earthquake in Genoa, now headed for San Diego as refugees from San Francisco’s earthquake and fire of 1906.⁷ The Italian area was a ten square block section of town near the harbor. A fish cannery,

⁵O’Malley. States “He [Corrado] came to Los Angeles to join an Italian sculptor from Florence. This man was doing principally fresco work on home interiors. He took the young student and / him the profession.” Evidence for Gino Corrado working on the expo comes primarily from photographs in GCC.

⁶ Correspondence addressed to Gino Liserani dated August 1913, sent from Florence, Italy. GCC. The postcard sent to Signorino Gino Liserani (“Mr. Gino Liserani,” Corrado’s given name) was mailed from Florence in August 1913. The card was addressed “1739 Front St.” in San Diego, but a postal worker or resident penciled in “try 1200 Laurel Street” either because it was Corrado’s forwarding address or it was a boarding house in the city’s Italian area.

⁷ Canice Gardner Ciruzzi, “India Street and Beyond: A History of the Italian Community of San Diego, 1850-1980,” (M.A.Thesis. University of San Diego. 1980).33-34. See also “Little Italy Loomed Large,” *San Diego Tribune* 17 October, 1989. D-1, and Kimber M. Quinney and Thomas J. Cesarini, *San Diego’s Little Italy* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub., 2007),.

where many Italians worked, was built in 1909.⁸ Corrado's residence in "Little Italy" on Laurel Street was about two miles from his work site at Balboa Park.



Figure 3. An early photograph of Gino Corrado Liserani, with unknown women, circa 1913.

Corrado later said in a publicity piece that he had apprenticed for a sculptor that had a school in Los Angeles and received a commission in San Diego, but no name was mentioned. Another clue was that Corrado's teacher also was a friend of his father and studied sculpture in an academy in Florence. The exact identity of this artist is unknown, and there are actually several possibilities as many master sculptors learned their craft in Florence and more than one taught in Los Angeles before World War I. Among the many artists drawn to San Diego, were two Italian sculptors that had studios or schools in Los

⁸ William C. Richardson, "Fisherman of San Diego: The Italians," *The Journal of San Diego History*, 27, no. 4. (Fall 1981). Accessed online.

Angeles and received commissions from Spreckels and for the fair: Alphonso Iannelli and Felix Peano. Another strong possibility for Corrado's employer is Carlo Romanelli for his connection to Florence. Complicating matters, Corrado may have worked for all three Italian sculptors in San Diego from the years 1912-1916.

Romanelli who worked at an art school in Los Angeles and came from a long line (four generations) of sculptors in Florence. In the old country, Romanelli's father Raffaello was both a professor at an art school and a sculptor with a studio in Florence. The key to Florence's success as a touristic and commercial center in the second half of the twentieth century was the promotion of the city's artisans and artisanal heritage as representative of fine taste. The senior Romanelli probably knew Corrado's father and grandfather back in Italy when they had worked at world's fairs promoting Florentine art to the wider world, and when Corrado's father was a marble supplier.⁹

Corrado may have worked for Alfonso Iannelli who rivaled Romanelli's accolades. A native of Andretta, Iannelli was born in a small village in southern Italy. His father had immigrated to Newark, New Jersey and sent for the family when established, thus Iannelli first came to America when he was ten. When he was seventeen he won a school scholarship and apprenticed with sculptor Gutzon Borglum (the future designer of Mount Rushmore) in New York City who attempted to express himself with the romanticism and idealism found in the American frontier to produce a truly American

⁹ D. Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 80-81. There is a possibility that Carlo Liserani met Carlo Romanelli in Chicago. A bronze statue made by Romanelli when he was in Chicago was signed in 1912 "Carlo Romanelli, Chicago." See Andy Yoon Sculpture Gallery (New Zealand): www.trocadero.com/andysculpturegallery/items/644564/item644564store.html

monumental art. Some advice he wrote to his young pupil was: “Be simple, listen to your own impulses and work quietly and thoughtfully.”¹⁰

Iannelli opened a small shop in New York where he continued to work for Borglum and others, eventually doing design work for magazines, illustrating in several of the New York-based national monthlies such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Ladies Home Journal*. Iannelli ultimately opted to go west instead of to Europe which was the common procedure of young artisans wishing to complete their formal training. After a stint in Cincinnati, he landed in Los Angeles where he went on a quest to develop American art. He derided the use of art from other countries, and promoted the use of Native American designs (especially Aztec). In an essay he endorsed the use of cubist art, which although a new art form, he explained the geometric forms of the circle, triangle, and square had been utilized since ancient times by North American Indians and other ancient peoples.¹¹

Some of Iannelli's ideas were influenced by a political art movement in Italy led by artist Filippo Martinetti, known as “Futurism.” As the name indicated, the tenets of Futurism included a profound break from the Italy's nostalgia for its past in literature, art and theater, even so far as calling for the destruction of museums. Futurism was influential in the art world of several countries outside of Italy, most notably in Russia, where several artists in St. Petersburg and Moscow—despite being somewhat anti-

¹⁰ Sharon Goldman Rubin, “Alfonso Iannelli: The Career of an Artist in the American Social Context, 1906-1965” (PhD. Diss., University of Minnesota, 1973), 10.

¹¹ Rubin, “Alfonso Iannelli,” 35-45.

technology and not attaching a political platform to aesthetics—had a shared ideology with some of its theoretical propositions.¹²

Not unlike Futurism, Iannelli's major philosophical and aesthetic concepts included promoting education for the artist as means of social function, collaboration with other artists, and geometric symbols in the spirit of design. His attempts at the development of a truly American art brought him into the attention of several architects in Los Angeles that were commissioned to work in San Diego. Iannelli designed the reliefs for the Workingman's Hotel in collaboration with Harrison Albright and John Lloyd Wright—two innovative builders working in San Diego. Iannelli also worked on the sculpture on the Spreckels Organ Pavilion, the world's largest outdoor organ, for the Panama-Pacific Exposition.¹³

Felix Peano, another Italian sculptor, in contrast to Iannelli, was much more beholden to predecessors in his art but whose art did represent a classicist ornate craftsmen style movement in architecture and decorative art known as Art Nouveau. Peano had set up a studio in the center of San Diego's Italian district, not far from Corrado's residence, where he displayed his wax busts of famous local figures in the window; he also bought large advertisements in the local newspaper advertising that he worked in all metals. Peano was born in Turin (where he studied at a school with Odoardo Tabacchi—a renowned master), lived in Rome, and later moved to Paris—the

¹² Nina Gurianova, *The Aesthetics of Anarchy: Art and Ideology in Early Russian Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 58-61. For key differences between Italy and Russia see page 63. Rubin, "Alfonso Iannelli", 43-45.

¹³ Rubin. "Alfonso Iannelli," 46-56.

heart of the Art Nouveau movement—before finally coming to America. Fluent in three languages, Peano taught at several art institutions in San Francisco and claimed he revived the forgotten casting process of fifteenth-century Florentine Renaissance sculptor Benvenuto Cellini. In 1911 Peano moved to Los Angeles before heading south to San Diego. One of his earliest commissions there was statuary for the opulent 1915-seat Spreckels Theatre which opened in August of 1912. When commissions for sculpture became less available, or to supplement his income or to keep his workers busy, he branched out into working on San Diego's film studio backlots. Peano was later an innovator in the construction of movie props in San Diego for several film studios.¹⁴

San Diego was California's first film center during the silent era. Civic leaders had attempted to court large motion picture studios to locate in the area, particularly on the nearby island of Coronado. In order to entice companies in this fast-growing industry and compete with other film centers in California—mainly the town of Hollywood which in 1910 annexed itself to Los Angeles—Spreckels, who owned most of the island, actually offered Lubin film studios free rent on a five-year lease on Coronado. The catch was a clause requiring all employees (even bosses) as having to reside on Coronado Island.¹⁵

¹⁴ Thanks to Bill Myler (Austin, Texas) for sharing family correspondence. Letter, dated 1 July 1918, from Felix Peano of Ingelwood, CA, sent to M. Paggi (Austin, Texas). See also "Felix Peano and His Metal Art Work," *Los Angeles Herald* 9 July 1905, 39. As early as 1902, Peano had patented improvements in ornamental statuary as an "economical means of surface ornamentation and plastic embellishment." See "Forming Statuary or Other Ornamental Structures," U.S. Patent 706775A.

¹⁵ "Lubin Studio Formally Opened," *The Strand* (Coronado, California), 2 October 1915, 1. See also "Moving Picture at Work," 7 August 1915, 1.

Corrado started a career in film in Coronado when a studio prop master (the individual responsible for the props) asked him and his boss to build a fountain for a scene in a film directed by Edward Sloman, a recently-arrived British director. Sloman, who was under contract to direct a series of pictures with Lubin Studios, liked the Latin looks of Corrado and cast him as an artist in another film. Corrado enjoyed working in front of the camera and was soon hired as a stock player. Corrado later remembered the studio where he first worked was the American Film Company, one of several motion picture companies based in the area to take advantage of San Diego's weather. He may also have done some work at this studio as an actor, although he more likely worked in the prop department with his boss.¹⁶

Corrado created props on Coronado Island during off-hours and it is here that Peano might have been Corrado's employer building the props for studios and later patented a wax method for making dummies and statues. In an interview in 1976, Corrado claimed he began his acting career at 19 years of age which would have been 1912. This is plausible because at that time film companies worked at a frenzied pace; at least 100 films were shot in San Diego in 1912, a record number in the city's history.¹⁷

The only movie filmed in San Diego where Corrado's appearance was found was *A Sister to Cain*. Shot in February 1916 and released in theaters the following month, the short film was a drama directed by Sloman for Lubin Studios in Coronado. In this film

¹⁶ O'Malley 1929: 2, GCC.

¹⁷ Gregory L. Williams, "Filming San Diego: Hollywood's Backlot, 1898-2002," *The Journal of San Diego History*, 48, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 95-105

Corrado was billed as “Gene Liserani” and played a “dancer.”¹⁸ This was likely a bit part and may attest to him still working or apprenticing as a fine sculptor. However, Corrado had aspirations to become an actor and was alerted to the news that Hollywood was fast eclipsing San Diego as a destination for employment in the motion picture industry.¹⁹

Corrado may have heard that a new movie city was built in Los Angeles. Nothing in scale compared in San Diego, and large posters for the new Universal City proclaimed an “entire city built and used exclusively for the making of pictures” contained the world’s largest motion picture stage. The “world’s only movie city” sent representatives to the San Diego Exposition which could have informed Corrado of the March 15 opening and prompted him to conclude that despite San Diego’s impressive studio activity, the city of Los Angeles would soon become the industry’s capital. In June of 1915, Universal sent 75 beauty contest winners and fifty actresses to the San Diego Exposition. At the Plaza de Panama, the crowd at the fair was used as a background for a film, with several of the buildings, which likely included the Southern California Counties Building, in the scenes.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid. *A Sister to Cain* was filmed 26 February 1916 and starred Helen Wolcott, Evelyn Page, George Routh, and Ben Hopkins. IMDB.com lists Corrado’s film credit.

¹⁹ The number of films shot in San Diego seems to diminish in 1917, when only about seven pictures were filmed. See Gregory L. Williams, with assistance by Bill Griswold, and Liz Abbott, “San Diego Filmography,” *San Diego Historical Society Quarterly* Vol. 48, No. 2 (Spring 2002). Accessed online.

²⁰ “Light and Noir: Exiles and Émigrés in Hollywood, 1933–1950,” Exhibit that ran from February 23, 2014 through March 1, 2015. Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles (a co-exhibit with the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences). The exhibit featured a copy of the original 1915 Universal City poster, courtesy of NBC-Universal Archives and Collections. See also *San Diego Union*, 15 June 1915, Classified Section, 2, and *San Diego Union*, 16 June 1915, 7.

Corrado later claimed that it was Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle, one of the nation’s best-known film players, who first advised him to try his luck in Hollywood if he had ambition in becoming an actor. This may have been in 1915, when *Fatty and Mabel at the San Diego Exposition* was filmed by the Los Angeles-based Keystone Company in San Diego, using the exposition plaza where Corrado had worked as part of the story. Or also possible, Corrado met Arbuckle on September 10, “Movie Day,” where several dozen movie stars paraded at the fair and ended up at a dinner and an open-air ball that was open to the public.²¹ The baby-faced, obese Arbuckle was earning a princely salary at the time, was the nation’s second most popular comedian (after Charlie Chaplin) and since moving to Keystone in 1913 had directed his own slapstick films in which he starred. As a director, Arbuckle espoused the creative possibilities of the new technological medium of film over that of traditional theater and may have been happy to guide a young aspiring player like Corrado. If there was any doubt, Arbuckle could have named the major investments in studio construction in the Hollywood area, and attested to the multitude of stars who like himself headed for Los Angeles from the rival film centers of San Diego, Chicago, New York (Fort Lee, New Jersey), Jacksonville (the winter film capital with over thirty companies and a thousand actors operating there,

²¹ Peter Bogdanovich, *Allan Dwan: The Last Pioneer* (New York: Praeger, 1971). In an oral interview, Allan Dwan (who would later direct Corrado in *The Iron Mask*) recounts how he filmed a scene from *Soldiers of Fortune* in 1913, where it is quite possible that Corrado may have appeared as an extra: “I went down and used the fairgrounds in San Diego which were perfect for a small Latin republic. They were kind of magnificent too -- all in plaster. And I got practically all the people in San Diego working in the picture. There were no unions in those days, so I put an ad in the paper inviting the populace to bring their lunches and come out to Balboa Park to see a picture being made. And they came in droves. I put straw hats on them, and when I brought my actors by, I said, “Wave those straw hats,” and they all waved them. Thousands of people in the picture, all having a good time, eating their lunch and waving straw hats and getting no money, being allowed to see a picture being made.”

including a small Lubin branch) or other lesser-known cities with smaller film industries.²²

Upon the advice of Arbuckle, Corrado quit his job as a sculptor to go to what was quickly becoming the film mecca: Hollywood. Corrado's employer thought the future actor unwise and ungrateful, according to Corrado's later publicity piece, noting that he had "made a fortune in his business while Gino has been struggling in his."²³

²² Richard Alan Nelson, *Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 1898-1980* (New York: Garland, 1983), 157, 162-163.

²³ O'Malley, 2, GCC.

CHAPTER FOUR
HOLLYWOOD OR BUST:
MAKING IT IN THE INDUSTRY

In March of 1916, Corrado made his way to Hollywood. If Corrado happened to become lost upon first arriving, he could have easily spotted D.W. Griffith's towering sets of *Intolerance* from almost anywhere in town. As a part-time prop maker himself, Corrado would have been excited to finally see for himself the immensity of scale that the actors traveling between Los Angeles and San Diego would have been reporting. For the Babylonian scene in *Intolerance*, walls were erected three city blocks long and 90 feet high. Sitting atop columns were 125 foot elephant statues that were modeled on that of an earlier movie, *Cabiria*, an Italian epic film that had a highly successful run in America.¹

Cabiria, which had so impressed D.W. Griffith, was subsequently shown to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, and was the first film shown in the White House. The *Chicago Daily News* called it "A revelation [that] surpasses human belief." The film cost \$250,000 and required 7,000 actors, 20 elephants, hundreds of horses and took 14 months to complete. According to legend, upon reading reviews Griffith went to San Francisco to view *Cabiria*. When *Cabiria* later played in Los Angeles in August 1914, an article in the *Los Angeles Times* further exaggerated the publicity for the epic film, describing it as

¹ Juan Antonio Ramirez, *Architecture for the Screen: A Critical Study of Set Design in Hollywood's Golden Age* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 116-118.

“realistic, as where soldiers, scaling the city walls, are thrust back and drop many feet, and where huge baskets of soldiers, borne on a crane, are cut down, the baskets falling a hundred feet.” The same announcement mentioned an episode, if it is true, similar to the hype of *Intolerance*: “Of course the actors landed in nets, but even so, about fifty men were injured and placed in the hospital.”²

Only a few months earlier (March of 1914) Griffith had released his first film of the ancient world. *Judith of Bethulia* was a biblical tale about the Assyrian army’s siege of the Judean village of Bethulia, and the widow Judith’s plan to save the town. As this film was released to theaters prior to *Cabiria* in the U.S., *Picture Play* magazine claimed that *Cabiria* had actually copied several scenes such as the fights at the gates and the camping scenes from Griffith’s earlier production. However, *Cabiria* had clearly influenced the set design of the Babylonian scenes of *Intolerance*, such as the massive walls, pet leopards adorning the royal court, and the elephant statues.

The elephants in *Intolerance* and their Italian designers were the subject of the film *Good Morning, Babylon* (1987). But, did Griffith carefully seek out Italians to construct his sets? Or better yet, did they design his famed elephants? According to actress Lillian Gish, star of *The Birth of a Nation* and assistant to Griffith in *Intolerance*, 700 workers built the sets, supervised by a tobacco chewing, chief carpenter and set builder named Frank “Huck” Wortman, who previously built the sets for *The Birth of a*

² “Wonderful Movie Play,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 August 1914, III4.

Nation.³ The set building in *Intolerance* was the finest ever made at the time; however, the walls of Babylon needed the look of antiquity and posed a problem for the painters and plasters who could not give the massive walls the needed ancient impression that Griffith envisioned.⁴

Griffith remembered that when he visited the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco how he was struck at the artistry of the buildings and its implications to motion picture set construction. Taking over the assistant director duties of actor George Siegmann once he began acting (in the film's lead role of the Babylonian king Cyrus), Joseph Henabery described how Griffith had sent him to locate the Italian craftsmen who worked with paint, sculpture, and stucco (plaster of paris) for Doge's Palace at the Italian exhibit at the 1915 San Francisco World's Fair:

It had been almost two years since the Fair buildings were finished, and I figured that most of the men would have scattered to other parts of the country. Nevertheless, I went to San Francisco and scouted areas inhabited largely by Italians, because they were known to be good working with plaster of paris. I hired a car and was slowly driven through the streets, so that I could size things up as I passed. My first lead came when I went into a shop where they made small plaster of paris statues and other decorative things. I learned where one of the men who had worked on the Doge's Palace could be located.⁵

³ Lillian Gish. *The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me* (Edgewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969) Second Ed., 169.

⁴ Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 53.

⁵ Joseph Henabery; ed. Anthony Slide, *Before, In and After Hollywood* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press 1997), 117-119.

The men Henabery found? Three Italian plasterers that worked on Doge's Palace, plus a French painter who completed the aging effects on the Fair exhibit.⁶ They were each paid \$35 a week and brought to Los Angeles. Henabery then described how Griffith developed an open-air shop for the plasterers, with one of the Italian plasterers in charge of a large crew. Their work must have been extraordinary, as Henabery claims they were "wonderful at their trade" and the first artist he found was "a fine sculptor." Before proposing any sculpture to Griffith, they made small clay models. Once approved, the sculpture was created in a larger rendering, oftentimes glue molds made for the sake of cheap replication. All the statues (such as elephants and lions) were created by these plaster men using methods similar to what they learned in Italy. In fact, the origins of this craft date to the Renaissance era.⁷

Historically known as *figurinais*, Italians in this craft came from the Tuscan city of Lucca (sixty miles from Florence) and surrounding countryside, particularly the towns of Barga and Coreglia Antelminelli. Immigration was traditionally closed for members of this profession, and reserved for merchant and banking families, that is, until the sixteenth century. Once these restrictions on travel were lifted, the *figurinai*, generally males, ages ten to sixty, traveled to Italian cities such as Venice, Rome, Milan, and Florence, and later, because Napoleon's sister ruled the Lucca area, many went to France. Contemporary magazines described the *figurinais* as a principal artist that would create

⁶ Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By*. In this 1964 oral interview, Henabery mentions three craftsmen, not four, on page 53: "I brought down two sculptors and a painter."

⁷ Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By*, 118.

the molds, while several children with baskets full of small plaster statues peddled them on the street. Sometimes, after gathering experience and age, these peddlers would break away and start their own figure making business, harnessing child labor themselves.⁸

During the French Restoration (1815-1830), and the political upheaval in France, *figurinais*, who had relied on busts of Napoleon as their most popular statuette, suddenly found the French emperor to be unpopular and their craft under suspicion.⁹ Some of these Italian image makers went to a more politically-stable England, then from there, in the 1840s, to America. These plaster figurine makers had an important role in the spread of sculpture in nineteenth-century America.

The statuettes that *figurinais* sold were generally cheap reproductions of religious figures, crucifixes, and famous historical personalities, which for an American market would have certainly included busts of Christopher Columbus. Perhaps these figurine makers' most well-known contribution is their popularizing the display of the Nativity Scene in American homes.¹⁰

⁸ Paola A. Sensi Isolani, "Italian Image Makers in France, England, and the United States," *Italian Americans Celebrate Life: The Arts and Popular Culture*. (West Lafayette, IN: American Italian Historical Association, 1990). 95-111. Much of the information I used for the figurinai was culled from Isolani's excellent article.

⁹ John E. Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth Century Paris, London, and New York* (McGill-Queens University Press, 1992). Page 47 states: "In the region of Isere, Loire, Seine, Rhone, and Vienna at least a dozen young young figurinai from Lucca were apprehended for selling busts or plaster medallions of Napoleon or the archduchess Maria Luisa of Parma during the mid-1820s. In some cases the busts were sequestered; in other cases the tradesmen were deported."

¹⁰ Regina Soria, "I Figurinai: Lucca Plaster Figurine Makers in the U.S.A.," *Italian Americans in the Professions*. (Staten Island, NY: American Italian Historical Association, 1979) 265-267.

Mounting pressure against the use of the *figurinai*'s child street workers made them the target of derision, making it hard to earn a living. Though the *figurinai* provided a service for those who could not afford marble or bronze statuettes in their living parlor, changing tastes and a limited market forced these Italian image makers to try other means to practice their craft.

Figurinais from the Lucca area made up much of the labor force that created the plaster and staff decorations at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago.¹¹ Many opened shops in the Italian sections of American big cities and branched out to cater to a growing religious market by selling biblical and saint figures. It is here, at a figurine shop in San Francisco's Italian north shore that Joseph Henabery found his workers for *Intolerance*. In fact, one of the men that Henabery brought to Los Angeles never left the area and "established a shop to make small plaster of paris objects."¹²

Could Corrado have known any of these *figurinais*? As a Tuscan sculptor with experience, he associated with the same circles. He did have some experience making plaster statues, and displayed some examples well into his adult life.¹³ Corrado had a limited English vocabulary, and in the 1910 population census indicated that he could not speak English. In fact his later publicity piece states he only knew a few basic phrases at

¹¹ Ibid. 110 (in a footnote): "It was in fact the *figurinai* from Barga and Coreglia who in 1893 completed most of the plaster and stucco decorations at the Columbia Exposition in Chicago."

¹² Henabery, *Before, In and After Hollywood*, 119.

¹³ According to Ernie Black, Corrado's estate items contained a few plaster busts, all signed by Gino Corrado ("Gino Liserani") himself. These were sold prior to the author viewing them. The description of these busts seems to indicate a stylistic and cultural affinity to that of the *figurinai*.

the time, which jokingly included “No spik Eenglish.” Letters from concerned family members also attested to the urgency that Corrado master the language, especially when compared to his two living brothers, who being born in America, spoke fluent English (and thus had a completely different assimilation experience than their eldest sibling). Except for his semester at seminary in Illinois, and perhaps another at the Belmont School in California, he probably had little contact with folks outside of the Italian immigrant community, something that was entirely possible in the era. Considering that he lived in “Little Italy” sections of American cities such as in San Francisco’s North Beach where there were several long-established Italian bookstores that made it possible to read Italian-language books and newspapers, and with nearby playhouses where he could have enjoyed Italian theater, he may have been comfortable in this environment.¹⁴ It is quite possible that Corrado, heading to Hollywood, first went to the small Italian section of town, Elysian Park (which at the time also comprised today’s Chinatown) where 3,800—or about one-third of the neighborhood’s residents—were Italian, to get the scoop on how to get film work.¹⁵ Here he would have heard from his fellow countrymen of Griffith’s use and preference of skilled Italians. *Skilled* would be a key piece of advice that he would have to consider if he, an actor with little experience, was to seek a part in the picture.

¹⁴ One such bookstore was Libreria Cavalli at 263 Columbus Avenue near Corrado’s boarding house. See http://cavalliacafe.com/cavalli_history7.html where a photograph taken by J.B. Monaco in 1907 shows books and newspapers on display in the Cavalli store window. (The store moved several times and is today a café/bookstore, with the 263 Columbus location now the site of City Lights.)

¹⁵ Marian Gatto, *Los Angeles's Little Italy* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub, 2009), 44. Gatto writes that most of these Italian immigrants were concentrated on the 500-800 block of Castelar Street.

Griffith's previous film, the Civil War and Reconstruction epic *The Birth of a Nation*, had been a blockbuster, and was still playing—enjoying an exceptionally long international first run—when Corrado was in Hollywood. Corrado's later publicity tells the story of him breaking into acting, and if it is to be believed, Corrado arrived in Hollywood with only ten dollars in his pocket and set his sights on working in D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*, which was already in production. Griffith's casting director for *Intolerance* was George Siegmann who also held the assistant director duties. When Corrado inquired about getting a part in the film, the imposing Siegmann, at six foot two inches in height and weighing 225 pounds, warned Corrado that Griffith was now working on the set and was unapproachable. Corrado's next move was genius.¹⁶

Until the chaos and disruption of World War I, Europe was at the forefront of feature-length film-making. Indeed Italy, not America, had produced the first historical epic moving picture, *Cabiria*, which soon became the talk of Hollywood. Produced by the Itala Film Company in Turin—and not the Ambrosia film company as mentioned in Corrado's publicity—the picture had a successful run in American theaters and influenced Griffith to produce his own historical epic. Corrado, in perhaps one of his greatest acting roles ever, bypassed Siegmann to get a meeting with Griffith by posing as a newly arrived actor affiliated with Ambrosia.¹⁷

¹⁶ O.Malley, 2-3. GCC.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Corrado's ruse is suspiciously similar to another actor's entrance into on-screen work: Henry Lehrman. An Austrian immigrant who met studio head Mack Sennett at a theater where he was an attendant, Sennett encouraged Lehrman to come down to the Biograph studio at Fort Lee, New Jersey. The very next day Lehrman called on Sennett, but he was told that the director was busy and not expecting visitors, so Lehrman bypassed the door attendant at Biograph studios by pretending he was a Frenchman from the Pathé film company of France. He managed to get work as an extra, later becoming an actor and eventually a director of his production company. He subsequently was nicknamed "Pathé" Lehrman when Griffith found this out, a name that stuck for several years.¹⁸

Typically two items were fabricated by a studio's publicity department, particularly in the silent film era: first, an actor's age, and, second, how the actor was introduced to show business. As could be expected, Corrado had a few years shaved off in publicity, though this may have been at the actor's request. Corrado's publicity was generally correct, except for his age. As for Corrado posing as an Ambrosia actor, validating the story is difficult. However, a possibility exists that Corrado had to lie and exaggerate to get himself in the film. Considering just how Italian he would have appeared to be—accent, hand movements and all—and how he may have been advised to claim that he was highly skilled, he may have seen it as his best option.

¹⁸ Gene Fowler, *Father Goose: The Story of Mack Sennett* (New York: Covici Friede, 1934), 91.

One other possibility: Ambrosia and Cines were Italy's two largest studios (Itala being the third), and the Ambrosia studio was requisitioned by Italy's government during World War I to make airplane propellers.¹⁹ Did Corrado hear about this in Italian-language newspapers or magazines? If so, it would have given validity for his unemployment and desperate voyage to the gates of Babylon to beg for work. Though some of these stories are difficult to prove, one thing is for certain: Corrado received a role in the picture and a contract to boot. Though Corrado was not strikingly handsome by Hollywood standards, Griffith liked what he saw in the young actor. By now, Griffith had learned from his earlier casting mistakes at Biograph, where he once remarked "light eyes look white and wild or startled." He may have thought Corrado's dark hair and eyes photographed well, and accordingly cast him as "the Runner" in the Babylonian scene. As not even principal actors received credit, it was an uncredited role. On screen, Corrado was clearly visible in the role. Henabery mentioned that even at the last minute "new scenes were being added," and, perhaps attesting to Corrado's story that he was given a part well into the production of the film, the Babylonian runner part was roughly inserted into the storyline.²⁰ Griffith liked Corrado enough that after completing the film he signed him on as a stock player at \$35 a week—quite a salary for the era. In a later interview, Corrado claimed that a stunt attracted Griffith's attention:

The first movie I ever made was *Intolerance* with D.W. Griffith. He wanted somebody to jump into a net, 60 feet. I took a chance, to make a hit with Griffith.

¹⁹ Ivo Bloom, "Ambrosio," in Abel (editor), *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, 19.

²⁰ Henabery, , *Before, In and After Hollywood*, 120.

I said I'll do it. So they put me on the roof of an old palace, and I fell backwards into the net, landing on my back, bouncing three or four times. He put me under contract. This was the second day I worked for him.²¹

Writers such as film historian Richard Schickel observe that Griffith had an uncanny eye for discovering feminine talent (such as Pickford, the Gish sisters, and Mae Marsh), but was somewhat less adept at spotting male stars. One possibility for this may have been that Griffith, as the "alpha-male," wanted no challenger to his authority on the set.²² Actor Marshall Nieland, who worked with Griffith, explained some of Griffith's techniques for casting and directing the actors, comparing him to David Belasco, an American theatre director and producer who had a keen attention to detail and led a movement to make the director rather than the actors the star of a production:

He was the Belasco of the screen. He could take obscure people and instill confidence in them. His policy was to discover talent outside the ranks of the theatre, and he could pick types, as Belasco did, with an unerring eye. At the same time he had a bag of tricks which never failed to work. For instance, he'd come into the studio in the morning frowning and gloomy, speaking to no one and getting all the poor devils hoping to earn a few dollars that day into such a state of nerves they didn't know whether they were coming or going. Just when the whole outfit thought they were going to be fired, he'd start shooting, and he'd get from this tense situation a fine nervous scene, emotional and at the same time artistic.²³

²¹ In *The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me*, Gish claims that when the extras heard they would receive an additional \$5 if they would jump of the wall into nets, "all the extras started leaping from the parapets." (page 176). Henabery on page 332 of his autobiography states that Gish's statement is silly. On page 126, he goes into detail about a circus performer and stuntman named Leo Nomis that initially showed three high divers how to fall into the nets by landing on their backs and never on their feet. Each one did the opposite and broke their noses. Griffith, unsuccessful and exhausted after taking multiple takes, then resorted to using dummies.

²² Richard Schickel, *His Picture in the Papers: A Speculation on Celebrity in America Based on the Life of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.* (New York: Charterhouse, 1973). 38, Schickel claims that the masculine Douglas Fairbanks posed a problem to an alpha-male like Griffith while at Biograph.

²³ "Adventures with D. W. Griffith," *Films in Review*, December 1973, 481.

Griffith tried to style *Intolerance* as an Italian epic and before its debut in New York City he gave it a two-day run away from the Hollywood reporters in Riverside, California. Possibly to confuse the press, it was billed under the dual title “The Downfall of All Nations”—or “Hatred of the Oppressor,” directed by a fictitious Dante Guilio—whom the advertisement assured was a “famous Italian director.” The movie also showed in nearby Pomona ten days later and was unashamedly boosted as being greater than “‘The Clansman,’ ‘Caberia’ [SIC], and ‘Ben Hur’ combined.”²⁴ Upon its debut in New York officially billed as *Intolerance*, one reviewer commented that the Babylonian portion of the film was a masterpiece that would commend it to the public, but cautioned that the other stories caused confusion. Another review the next day said that the film was an extraordinary jumble though again the Babylonian scenes defied criticism and that Griffith ranked with Cyrus in conquering Babylon.²⁵

Still, Griffith’s name above the title could not ensure success for *Intolerance*, a stylistically innovative and artistic film that told four simultaneous stories. Actress Lillian Gish points to Griffith’s lack of promoting stars as a reason that hurt the picture, as even the leads went uncredited, and one of the reasons that they left to other studios.²⁶

Henabery claims the picture was too sophisticated and treated subject matter that was

²⁴ Russell Merritt, “D.W. Griffith’s *Intolerance*: Reconstructing an Unattainable Text,” *Film History* Vol.4, No. 4, 341 [quoted from the *Riverside Press* 4 August 1916, 3].

²⁵ “*Intolerance* Impressive: D.W. Griffith’s New Picture is a Stupendous Spectacle,” *New York Times*, 6 September 1916, 7. See also Alexander Wolcott, “Second Thoughts on First Nights,” *New York Times*, 10 September 1916, X5.

²⁶ Gish, 181

unfamiliar to American audiences. And the timing of the anti-war film, right when America was gearing up for war, also did not help. Though the film had a big opening, the general public stayed away and the production barely turned a profit, marking the beginning of the decline of Griffith's career.²⁷ In this context it is worthy of note to consider the small part Corrado played as with *Intolerance* Hollywood surpassed the colossal scale of sets of the Italian epic pictures, and European cinema would generally cease to compete with the extravagant production of American movies.²⁸

Corrado soon became familiar with many early studios in Hollywood. In September 1916, the Majestic Motion Picture Company (of which Griffith was the general manager) informed the actor that he was being laid off until the company's two affiliates moved to Los Angeles from New York.²⁹ From late 1916 until 1920, the actor played comedy bit parts and bounced around several studios: Christie, Triangle, Keystone, Mena, Goldwyn, and Bluebird/Universal. Corrado appeared in at least eighteen films during this period, including *The Law of the Great Northwest* (1918, Triangle), *Bold, Bad Night* (1918, Christie), and *The Sleeping Lion* (1919, Universal).

At Christie of Christie Studios—a studio which produced mostly comedy shorts of slightly inferior quality than that of Hal Roach studios—made Corrado Anglicize his

²⁷ Anthony Slide, *Silent Topics: Essays on Undocumented Areas of Silent Film* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 27. Slide's estimate originally cited from *Variety* (2 September 1928) gives the cost of *Intolerance* at 1.6 million and its gross at 1.75.

²⁸ Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen*, 116.

²⁹ Letter, dated 5 September 1916, from (J.C. Epping?) of Majestic Motion Picture Company (4500 Sunset Blvd.) sent to "E. Liserani." GCC.

name because he wanted no foreign names in his studio. Christie signed Corrado for two years, where the young actor played in skits with many famous veteran comedians such as Chester Conklin. For the next five years the actor went by the name “Eugene Corey” or simply “Gene Corey.”³⁰ The early domination by the French company Pathè of the American film industry may have led some to believe that the American film industry needed to be more “American.” The Christie brothers may have wanted American-sounding names for their actors, though they themselves were Canadian (albeit Anglo-Canadians) to portray a more marketable, wholesome American image—one more familiar to small town exhibitors during the World War.

The popularity of films from Italy exhibited in America had risen and all but fallen by World War I. A large niche market had been carved out initially by George Kleine, a German-American motion picture pioneer and film importer. Beginning in 1912, Kleine convinced several film exchanges and theaters in large cities, to take Italian features and shorts. An agreement between Kleine’s Photo-Drama company in Chicago and Ambrosio of Turin, Italy called for four motion pictures of no less than 2,000 meters in length, to be made within an eighteen month period, similar to those in the imported blockbuster *The Last Days of Pompeii*—in all, a million lire deal.³¹ These would be

³⁰ O’Malley. Page three reads: “With a temporary let-up in Griffith’s activities Gino went over to the Christie Studio, where he played cops and old men for two years, under the name Eugene Corey. The change was Mr. Al Christie’s idea. He wanted no foreign names in his studio. Foreigners didn’t go over well in those days.” GCC.

³¹ Contract between Ambrosio and George Kleine, 20 June, 1913. The early president of the company was Mario A. Stevani. Though George Kleine was driving force, he was officially the Treasurer. George Kleine Manuscript Collection, Box 1, File “Ambrosio [Societa Anonima Ambrosio, 1913-1920]”. GKC, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

mainly ancient Roman epics—and newsreels or “scenics,” such as the highly popular *Scenes of the Turkish-Italian War*. Italian comedies, however, were strongly rejected due to a consensus among film exhibitors of their unpopularity with the American public.³²

Kleine shaped the content of the films—partly, to get them past the American censors and avoid costly editing, but also to maximize popularity with exhibitors and expand into an upscale English-speaking market. Kleine urged his Italian filmmaker partners to watch American films, “using judgment of those that have merit, for guidance in their own work.”³³ Films whose main plot lines included gambling, theft, killing or wounding were never sent to America. Costuming was important, and Kleine advised that foreign films lost strength when actors were in peasant costumes.³⁴ One movie scene construed as potentially confusing to an American audience involved two convicts in a penitentiary that kissed each other—a problem of men becoming too sympathetic with each other, according to Kleine.³⁵

³² Memorandum from Sussfeld, Lorsch and Company, New York to George Kleine, 25 June, 1912. This confidential memorandum for Mr. Delecroix of the Cines Company stated, “The consensus of opinion among exhibitors is favorable to Cines’ dramatic and spectacular films, tolerant of scenics, and opposed to comedies. We are now reluctantly compelled to accept the view that most of the exhibitors that have received our films do not like Cines comedies.” p. 3. Box 1, File “Ambrosio [Societa Anonima Ambrosio, 1913-1920]. GKC, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³³ Memorandum from Sussfeld, Lorsch and Company, New York to George Kleine, 25 June, 1912 p. 4. Box 1, File “Ambrosio [Societa Anonima Ambrosio, 1913-1920]. GKC, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁴ Correspondence from George Kleine to Cines, 14 February, 1912. Box 7; “Cines 1912.” GKC, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁵ Ibid.

A few problems marred at least one large shipment of film negatives from Cines of Italy. The initial mechanical glitches were with the perforations in the film not matching the sprockets of their projectors, and though the problem was worked out (Cines blamed the factory), it caused a few irritated exhibitors to cancel subsequent orders—an episode which had Kleine chastising the Cines company.³⁶

Though these imported films targeted an American general public, Italians living in the Little Italys of large cities—particularly New York and Chicago—would make up a significant share of the revenue, prompting Kleine to place advertisements in the Italian-language daily newspapers. Kleine explained his strategy to target this audience in correspondence to Cines in Rome in 1912: “We have a large Italian population, and if one can induce them to visit the various theatres in their neighborhoods and ask for Cines films, it may have an influence on our sales.”³⁷

In 1913, Cines released *Quo Vadis?*, which became an overnight sensation. At two-and-a-half hours long (8,000 feet of film) it was shown alone as a complete performance in large theaters. Kleine, by now an experienced movie mogul, wrote to a movie theatre owner on Broadway that, “This is unquestionably the finest film yet made.”³⁸ With a gross theatre income of \$822,364 in America, *Quo Vadis?* became the

³⁶ Correspondence from George Kleine to Societe Italiana Cines, 22 April 1914. Box 7, Folder 5. Cines “1914,” GKC, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁷ Correspondence from George Kleine to Societe Italiana Cines, 23 May, 1912. Box 7, Folder “Cines 1912.” GKC, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁸ Correspondence from George Kleine to Pat Casey, 6 March, 1913. GK Box 7; “Cines 1913 Jan-June” File 3. GKC, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

standard to which both companies aspired to surpass with all future releases—a goal which was never realized.³⁹ A contract in 1913 between Kleine (as the Photo-Drama Company of Illinois) and the Turin-based Ambrosio, specifically named *Quo Vadis?* as the model for a successful foreign film. The contract called for future releases to contain, when permitted, elaborate scenes of 2,000 people—likely a minimum definition of what constituted an epic film, necessary for advertising purposes—“as good in quality as the Cines production *Quo Vadis?*.”⁴⁰ Italian films were now growing in influence with American filmmakers and the American movie-going public, so by reading the Italian language newspapers in Chicago, San Diego, and now Los Angeles, Corrado may have been aware of the epic films produced in Italy and now exhibited in the United States.

Though it appears that Kleine endorsed Italian films for the consumption of an American public by changing actors’ names in publicity pieces, advising of acting techniques, putting his own name above the title, and copyrighting the negatives for the United States—another result was small American film studios creating their own copycat historical epics. One such was another *Quo Vadis* (with no question mark in the title), a low-budget American film made with the intent to confuse exhibitors into thinking they were ordering the Kleine version. After prosecuting the makers of the fake *Quo Vadis?* for the unauthorized usage of Kleine’s publicity material to promote their film—court fees alone cost him \$500—he assured the people at Cines, “This imitation

³⁹ GK Box 4; “Branches Accounting 1914-1916”. Kleine’s gross receipt was \$411,182.

⁴⁰ Copy of memorandum agreement between Societe Aninima Ambrosia, and Photo Drama Company of Illinois, 30 April, 1913. GK Box 1; “Ambrosio Presents.” GKC, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

film caused us some loss and we made every effort to prevent our posters and still photographs from being used to exploit the usurper's film."⁴¹

Despite George Kleine's efforts to promote the imported films—for example, a half-million circulars for the epic *Anthony and Cleopatra* were printed—business dwindled. In a letter dated July 9, 1914, Kleine complained that the quality of the Italian films diminished and that he was only able to keep less than half of the samples of dramatic subjects submitted, as the rest, he claimed, were “entirely unsuited to our market.”⁴² Kleine, who owned several film exchanges in major American cities, purchased and equipped a modern studio in the industrial northern Italian city of Turin, a rival film center to Rome for several decades. Unfortunately, his studio was completed in late July 1914, a few days before the start of World War I. He never produced pictures in Europe.⁴³ The onset of the war with its shipping disruptions and material shortages, studios—such as Ambrosia—being requisitioned for the war effort, along with overcapitalization and competition within the industry, brought the Italian film industry to virtual collapse.

From 1916 to 1922, Corrado played characters that were anything but Italian. An exception was *Gretchen the Greenhorn* (1916) in which Corrado worked after

⁴¹ Correspondence from George Kleine to Cines in Rome, dated 29 April, 1914. GK Box 7; Folder 5. GKC, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁴² Correspondence from George Kleine to Cines, 9 July, 1914. GK Box 7; Folder 6, “Cines 1914, May-July.” GKC, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁴³ *Motion Picture News*, 25 August 1923, 878. At his peak in 1920, Kleine had twenty-six exchanges. See also Robert S. Birchard, “Kleine, George,” in Abel (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Film*, 361.

Intolerance. Since its opening date was just prior to *Intolerance*, *Gretchen the Greenhorn* was officially Corrado's first Hollywood film release. The photoplay, starring Dorothy Gish, is about the immigrant experience in an impoverished crowded New York tenement. The opening inter-title in the film was: "Every day onto [*sic*] the great harbors of America come shiploads of hopeful immigrants, eager to try their fortunes in this golden land of opportunity." Corrado played the friend of Pietro, the Italian who falls in love with a Dutch girl named Gretchen, played by Dorothy Gish. A photograph in Corrado's collection showed him in the role of Pietro for a stage production version of the movie. Corrado acted the part of an Italian in the film in *The Velvet Hand* (1918) (originally titled *Vendetta's Daughter* with the story based in Milan.⁴⁴

The Americanization of films in the United States started in earnest during competition with Pathé, but during World War I, propaganda films were produced to support the war effort, such as *The Beast of Berlin* (1918), and *Why Germany Must Pay* (1919). More than 100 feature films related to the war effort were released in the United States in 1918, and Corrado appeared in at least two of them.⁴⁵ *Flames of Chance*, released on January 20 by Triangle Films, was a story about a woman who writes to three American prisoners of war in Germany during World War I and falls in love with one of them. *The Wildcat of Paris*, released at the end of 1918, had an interesting plot (written by Harvey Gates, who also wrote *Flames of Chance*): A girl nicknamed the "wildcat"

⁴⁴ In *The Velvet Hand*, Corrado played the part of Russino Russelli.

⁴⁵ Craig W. Campbell, *Reel American and World War I* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1985), 92.

who is the queen of the Paris underworld, played by Priscilla Dean, leads Paris ruffians to fight against the invading Germans.⁴⁶

Corrado claimed that he joined up (or was drafted) into the United States Army and was nearly courtmartialed for striking his sergeant. The trouble started, according to Corrado in a later interview, when he was called a “dago”—a believable hazing of immigrant raw recruits. According to Corrado: “He pushed me around. I beat him up. I got a year in jail but I didn’t serve it.”⁴⁷ Some elements of the story are remotely possible, but more likely, the story is a fabrication. Perhaps the story is allegorical of a fight started by Corrado when someone said he lacked valor for not supporting his host country during wartime; or also possible he was confusing another institutional experience with the army. Another possibility, later in his life as his memory faded, he conflated his brother’s experience with that of his own.

Corrado and his brothers were different ages and had distinct experiences during the war. Luigi Liserani, Corrado’s younger brother, had joined the military. He had not left San Diego when World War I began and was an aviator with the U.S. Navy, stationed on the west and east coast until 1919.⁴⁸ Lorenzo was in high school, worked

⁴⁶ Ibid. 185. However according to production photos and American Film Institute’s catalog, the “Apaches” in author Campbell’s entry are actually members of the French underworld.

⁴⁷ Corrado interview by Bill Cappello. Tape 1.

⁴⁸ World War I Soldier Service Records. Roll 15. California State Library; Sacramento. Louis enlisted on 10 December 1917 and was honorably discharged on 21 February 1919 according to National Archives and Records Administration; Washington, D.C.; Applications for Headstones for U.S. military veterans, 1925-1941; National Archives Microfilm Publication: A1, 2110-C; Record Group Title: Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General; Record Group Number: 92.

part-time at the San Diego County Poultry Association, and was presumably ineligible for the wartime draft.⁴⁹ Though Corrado participated in the propaganda front of World War I, he never saw service in the trenches of France. Although the Selective Service Draft Board classified him as fit for service on February 13, 1918, upon filling out a questionnaire, he received a deferred classification and on February 27 was classified as “5F” which was an alien citizen from a friendly country and thus not subject to military induction.⁵⁰ Had he been a citizen, he may not have escaped induction into the army, as only working actors that were leads were exempted.

The draft board received reports that many out-of-work actors were of draft age (17 to 31 years old). After a raid on an employment bureau that supplied studios with actors and extras netted twenty-eight individuals with each arrested “on suspicion of being a slacker,” an order was issued on July 23 and publicized in the newspapers. The edict was meant for those actors that were not leads but had sought exemptions, which would especially target bit players and extras—the bulk of those who labored on Hollywood’s backlots—though it is not clear if this would have included those working actors at Corrado’s level. The report read in part: “You are not essential to the motion picture profession, you are ordered to find some useful occupation between now and August 1 and to report to the War Squad every week.” Failure to comply with the request,

⁴⁹ U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005.

⁵⁰ Official notification postcards addressed to Eugene Liserani, at the Hotel Northern, Los Angeles, from the War Department, Local Board Div. 17. Two cards postmarked 13 Feb. and 27 Feb. 1918, noting Liserani’s (Corrado’s) classification status. GCC.

it was warned, would result in arrest and, if physical qualifications were met, immediate induction into the armed forces.⁵¹

Even Charlie Chaplin, 28-years-old and subject to the overseas draft was preparing himself in case of induction. He remembered that draft dodgers were sentenced up to five years in prison and that every man—presumably including an actor—was required to carry a registration card. War hysteria ran high as civilians often inquired as to why those able men in non-military apparel were not yet enlisted. Chaplin, despite being one of the era's biggest stars, was criticized by several newspapers for avoiding the military service as required for men his age. As he was clearly a lead player and one of the industry's highest paid actors, he remembers that others “came to my defense, proclaiming my comedies were needed more than my soldiering.”⁵²

Furthermore, the American Protective League, a volunteer citizen spy agency that worked with the Department of Justice's Bureau of Investigation (the forerunner of the FBI) provided information from within the film industry itself. When a German-born actor (who was often cast in ethnic German roles) was overheard “uttering many seditious and unpatriotic remarks” at a studio, he was taken into custody by an American Protective League agent and was convicted by a jury under the Espionage Act. The American Protective League was a national organization which at its height could claim

⁵¹ “Only Film ‘Leads’ are Regarded as Essential,” *Los Angeles Times* 23 July 1918, II 1.

⁵² Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 225. See also “Charlie Chaplin Studies Tactics: Among the First to Secure Capt. James’ Manual,” *Los Angeles Times* 23 July 1917, II2.

over one hundred thousand members nationwide making it difficult for an actor to hide. In New York, for instance, a photographer of models and actors also served as an investigator of seditious activity and slackers in his local area. In Los Angeles, operatives of the League actually patrolled movie theaters for Anti-American or pro-German films.⁵³

Motion picture director Cecil B. DeMille was the head of the local League branch in Hollywood, which counted about 2,700 members during the war. When peace negotiations seemed imminent and the war would soon end, the Chief of the Department of Justice, not wanting to disband such a loyal and effective organization, expanded the scope of the League, the “eyes and ears” of the government, to that of guarding against Bolshevik propaganda (following the Russian Revolution) or anything that did not conform to good citizenship. Though the League was dissolved at the end of the war and a minor scandal when the organization’s links to the military were leaked, members of the organization were recruited by other patriotic groups, including the Ku Klux Klan in the South. Some of the League’s records were used later by J. Edgar Hoover to convict radicals.⁵⁴

While under contract to Mack Sennett’s Keystone production company after the war, Corrado acted under the stage name of Eugene Corey. He later claimed that the

⁵³ Alfred Cheney Johnston’s 1918 certificate of rank as Investigator was auctioned on Ebay on 24 May 2011. “The War at Home,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1918, II2. (The actor was Armin von Harder.) See also “Seize Film as Pre-German,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 June 1918, 19. Originating in Chicago, by mid-July of 1917, the American Protection League had grown to 112,000 men and was in 900 U.S. cities and town. See Bill Mills, *The League: The True Story of Average Americans on the Hunt for WWI Spies* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013), 23.

⁵⁴ “To Keep After the Disloyal,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 November 1918, II2.

director Cecil B. DeMille at Famous Players-Lasky convinced him to change his name from Eugene Corey to Gino Corrado prior to the production of *The Ten Commandments*.⁵⁵ This is quite possible. A typed inter-office communication from the Famous Players-Lasky Studio, dated May 14, 1923, sent to the actor lists his name as “Corrado.” As DeMille was sometimes perceived as tyrannical, his changing the name of an actor appearing in one of his productions would have garnered little attention.⁵⁶ An article DeMille wrote for a college journal clearly spelled out the director’s leadership philosophy:

Combined with the art factors are those of military organization, especially when scenes call for handling of large masses of people. Generalship, more as innate quality, is an ever-present requisite. The director has to organize and control the various artistic and technical departments, which contribute to the making of a picture into concerted endeavor.⁵⁷

Perhaps Corrado took his middle name as his last name as a tribute to his deceased brother. Interestingly, Gino never changed his name legally; “Gino Corrado” was only his stage name. Corrado’s name on-screen was an issue even in 1917 when the young actor moved to different studios; in a later interview Corrado said that a director

⁵⁵O’Malley, 3. According to the publicity piece, DeMille liked Gino Corrado (his presumed real name, as there is no mention of “Liserani” in this short biography) and “delighted with the music of it and advised him to use it anyways.” GCC.

⁵⁶ Inter-Office Communication from Cullen Tate of Famous Players-Lasky Corporation Dated 14 May, 1923 to actors. Lists Corrado. GCC.

⁵⁷ “From Hollywood.” *Vo-Mag* Pasadena Junior College Magazine VI, no. II (May 1938): 3.

told him that Liserani was too hard to pronounce. The director he was referring may have been D.W. Griffith or Al Christie.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, Corrado thought about changing his name to embrace his Italian heritage as early as 1918. On the back of a publicity photograph for *The Velvet Hand*, Corrado penned in his distinctive writing: “‘Eugene Corey,’ please change name to ‘Gino Florentino,’ Phone 16128.” However, Corrado had inexplicably changed his mind and scribbled out the name. “Florentino” had distinction and a nice ring to it, and gave reference to his civic affiliation, but Corrado would have surely regretted “Florentino” upon the arrival of Rudolph Valentino as a matinee idol.⁵⁹

Valentino had played bit parts around Hollywood and probably knew Corrado in his early days. Despite the success of *The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse* where he had a major role but was still given a bit part in another film, the next picture that really made Valentino an international star was *The Sheik*, released in October, 1921, which was actually intended to showcase the talents of up and coming starlet Agnes Ayres. Corrado appeared in a supporting role with Ayres in *The Ordeal* and later with Valentino in *Beyond the Rocks* (both premiering in 1922). In the latter movie, Corrado plays a small part as a guest at a hotel who cheers the dancing of Valentino and his female partner, Ayres. *Beyond the Rocks* was directed by Sam Wood, and Corrado eventually appeared

⁵⁸ Ibid. 6-8.

⁵⁹ Gino Corrado publicity photograph for *Velvet Hand* (1918) with notation on reverse. GCC.

in eight pictures under his direction over the next two decades.⁶⁰ As sort of a “free-agent,” Corrado bounced between three studios during the 1922 and 1923 seasons. The main body of his work was at Paramount with the Famous Players-Lasky production unit (which had Valentino under contract for several pictures), but also included First National, and Universal.

Corrado’s brother Luigi tried his hand at working in Hollywood after leaving the army, inspired by his oldest brother’s success and possibly that of Valentino. Moving to Hollywood and billing himself as “Louis Dumar,” he appeared in a few films usually playing a French count or some variation of effeminate European royalty (much like Valentino did in his later films). In 1923, the actor concluded his attempt at stardom with a very small but notable appearance in the flamboyant *Salome* starring Alla Nazimova. Thereafter, food service was where he made his mark, and the movies were an afterthought.⁶¹

Los Angeles in the 1920s could count several popular Italian eateries that included the Italian Kitchen, Casa Grill, Sarno’s, Fazzi’s, and Dario’s. The center of the Italian culinary experience was the Paris Inn which started in Elysian Park in 1898 (and would change its name because of the Italian stigma during World War II to “Little Joe’s”) and featured singing waiters. Another important venue was the two-story Italian Hall which abutted Olvera Street that had a banquet hall, billiard parlor, and the city’s

⁶⁰ *Beyond the Rocks* (1922), *My American Wife* (1922), *Prodigal Daughters* (1923), *A Day at the Opera* (1935), *A Day at the Races* (1937), *Kitty Foyle* (1940), *Saratoga Trunk* (1945), and *Stratton Story* (1949).

⁶¹ IMDB.com had Dumar (Liserani) credited as acting in five movies in 1921-1922.

longest bar in its saloon. The two-story Italian Hall, built in 1907 by an L.A.-based Italian construction firm for the building's French owner, was near Corrado's early residence on North Broadway when he first came to Los Angeles. In all likelihood, the brothers frequented the hall's cultural amusements, such as theatrical or musical events, especially since Corrado did not speak much English.⁶²

The Italian Hall was at the center of Italian life in Los Angeles because of its political and social vibrancy. The spacious upstairs banquet hall was host to several Italian fraternal societies that included the Garibaldina Society, which had recently merged with another group, making it arguably the city's largest and most active Italian fraternal club. The Dante Alighieri Society often met at the hall and it is likely that Corrado and his brothers, both living in Los Angeles, were members. (Corrado's father, however, seems to have been living away from his wife and was likely not in Los Angeles in the 1920s.) Beginning with the Immigration Act of 1921 that lowered the number of immigrants allowed into the United States, and subsequent more extreme measures passed in the following few years by Congress that revoked Italy's position as the dominant European immigrant group, the Dante Alighieri Society became one instrument in a larger plan created by the new Fascist government to promote the idea of a far-flung Italian empire through its Italian-language art and culture programs. Thus the young Italian leader, Benito Mussolini, broke with previous governments by not forgetting immigrants once they left Italy. Mussolini instilled a national identity and

⁶² Gatto, *Los Angeles's Little Italy*, 93. See also Marge Bitetti, *Italians in Los Angeles* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 14; 39.

improved the international image of Italy through a variety of policies, and a few related to Hollywood, and ultimately, to Corrado himself.⁶³



Figure 4. “Eugene Corey” with actresses. Reading Italian-language “*Film*” magazine (published in Naples) as publicity for Christie Comedies films, circa summer 1920.

⁶³ Monte S. Finkelstein, “The Johnson Act, Mussolini and Fascist Emigration Policy: 1921-1930,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, volume 8, No.1, 46-48. See also William David Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 117-118. The Italian Hall, adjacent to the central Los Angeles Plaza, was also a meeting place for other ethnic groups around the polyglot city, such as Italian and Mexican socialists and anarchists before World War I. By 1920, writes Estrada, Mexicans were the majority ethnic group in the plaza.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOLLYWOOD'S FAVORITE DICTATOR:

BENITO MUSSOLINI AND THE DREAM OF A CINEMATIC EMPIRE

The politics of Italy greatly affected Gino Corrado and his career. Being a member of the Italian community, he witnessed the rise of Mussolini in 1922 and Hollywood's open support of Il Duce. Clear evidence indicates that Corrado himself became a supporter of Mussolini and his New Italy. The life and filmography of an Italian-American actor such as Corrado helps put Il Duce's story in context in regards to the international film industry. On October 28, 1922, Benito Mussolini seized power through his bloodless March on Rome. The leader forever changed Italian politics, and, eventually Italian cinema. And Corrado watched with great interest as Italy again seemingly regain its place on the international cinematic map.

Soon after becoming premier of Italy, Mussolini attempted to revive the declining Italian film industry by enticing American film companies to use Italy as a location spot. Several American film companies did travel to Italy including First National. Given that Mussolini was also determined to mold his political image and that there were more Italians living in the United States than anywhere else outside of Italy, it is hardly surprising that America became a prime concern. Courted by the Italian government, several big American studios experimented with using Italian locales for shooting the exteriors of pictures in the 1923-24 years. Though American filmmakers soon abandoned the trend of hailing Italy as the great new location, the country still

managed to briefly inspire the Italian film industry, the Italian American community, and Gino Corrado himself.¹

One Italian picture that made it into the American market was *Messalina* (1922). The picture's director, Enrico Guazzoni, was famous for directing *Quo Vadis?* in 1913. He arrived in America to sell the film after its re-editing and titling for the American market. When asked about the political conditions in Italy, the director emphasized: "In Italy there have been no more strikes since the advent of Mussolini to power. Everyone is working and happy." Specifically on the topic of film production Guazzoni remarked, "Conditions in Italy as to the production of motion pictures are on the way to improvement, after a period of stagnation which has been beneficial for the industry because it served to eliminate the spurious elements."² The film certainly had propaganda possibilities especially viewed in the context of Italy's wars of African conquest in Libya and Ethiopia.

In December of 1923, *Moving Picture World* reported:

The production of '*Messalina*' following such films as *Cleopatra* and *Julius Caesar*, was regarded with great interest by the King and Queen and others of the royal family, as well as the officials of the Italian government. They understood the far reaching advantages of publicity to be derived from the faithful reproduction of the Roman era. They were constant visitors during the construction of the settings and the filming of the scenes and extended all possible co-operation including the use of the Italian cavalry.³

¹ Harry Waldman, *Beyond Hollywood's Grasp*. (Metuchen: NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 200

² "Enrico Guazzoni Arrives with Print of Big Film '*Messalina*'," *Moving Picture World*, 1 December, 1923. 496.

³ Ibid.

Despite such grand illusions anticipating the triumph of the picture in the United States, the film was slammed by the critics. Though they admired the faithful realism of the sets and the beauty of the chariot races, one reviewer claimed the picture had no star power as the actors were foreign and advised any exhibitors renting the picture to advertise in the foreign language papers where there is a large foreign (meaning Italian) population. One vicious quote regarding the cast was: “Corpulent vampires may be quite the thing in Italy but in this land of slender damsels the Italian stars will not go over so big.”⁴ The plot was so confusing that reviewers could only give up on following the story and admire the sets. Though surely the short edit for American audiences was no help, the lack of familiarity with the Roman story may have further shaped the reviewers’ negative response to the picture. The reviews must have been a tough blow to Guazzoni (who both directed and wrote *Messalina*) as well as to the Italian film industry since the production cost almost two million dollars.

Immigrants from Italy living in large cities had the opportunity to watch an occasional film imported from the old country. But in the years following World War I, the quality and quantity of Italian films significantly declined. One of the first films that would break this pattern was in 1922 when George Kleine, (who had successfully distributed *Cabiria* and *Quo Vadis?*) in the United States, brought a picture from Italy titled *Julius Caesar*. In a review, *Exhibitor Trade Review* told theater owners what was most appealing about this Italian production, specifically referring to the last few years of

⁴ “Box Office Reviews,” *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 13 September 1924, 26.

inferior Italian films: “American exhibitors are prone to anticipate too much emotionalism in films made in Italy, but this one never once offends.” Further complimenting the realism, the reviewer wrote, “Students of the classics will be entirely satisfied with the reproductions of buildings, furniture, dress, armor, accessories; and who knows but that many of the participants in the picture may not be lineal descendants of the very Romans whose part they play?”⁵

Americans would see more of Il Duce. Pathé News captured images of Mussolini’s first act of international aggression with the Italian bombardment and capture of Corfu, Greece. Marveling at the speed with which the prints reached the American public, *Moving Picture News* noted “...these pictures were rushed back to Italy from Corfu, from Italy to Paris, and there placed upon the first out-going steamer arriving in New York...Just two weeks elapsed from the day of the occupation to the day of showing on Broadway.”⁶

One of the first American productions filmed in Mussolini’s Rome was *The White Sister* in 1923. The film featured an American principle cast, backed by Italian actors. Lillian Gish and Ronald Colman starred as a girl who becomes a nun after her fiancé—an Italian soldier—is mistakenly reported as being killed in action in Africa. Of interest is that the film from its inception was made for the American market with an eye toward the Italian Catholic population. *Moving Picture World* gave the picture a glowing

⁵ George Pardy, “Illustrated Screen Reports,” *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 18 February 1922, 861.

⁶ “Pathe News Scores Beat on Italy-Greece Fracas,” *Moving Picture World*, 29 September 1923, 435.

review, but warned exhibitors that they carefully consider their clientele. One theater in Utica, New York reported that at least 30 percent of its business to which the picture played came from the Italian community.⁷ *Exhibitor's Trade Review* wrote:

The tremendous popularity in Italy of F. Marion Crawford's novel *The White Sister* is being used as a factor in the exploitation of the picture in this country. The book is familiar to at least the last two generations in Italy. Thousands of Italians now here look upon the story as one of the great romances of their native land. Following the example set by the Shubert-Crescent Theatre in Brooklyn when the *White Sister* played there recently, exhibitors are circularizing the Italian population with pamphlets printed in Italian.⁸

The film had apparently received the blessings of both the church and Mussolini. While the American cast and crew was en route to Italy for filming, Monsignor Bonzano, a prelate of the church who was going to the Vatican to become a Cardinal, was also aboard the steamer. Given the film's story about a Catholic nun, he offered his services as a liaison between the fascist government and the church.⁹

Amazingly, the first fascist production and first feature film in which Mussolini himself appeared on the screen was produced by First National, an American company. The film titled *The Eternal City*, is another product of the short lived American flurry to make films abroad, particularly in Italy. The film is worth examining in detail, as this was for many in Hollywood their first introduction to Mussolini and Italian Fascism.

George Fitzmaurice, an American director born in France (but of French-Dutch ancestry), acquired the rights for the story from British author Sir Hall Caine while in

⁷ "The 'White Sister' Appeals to Italian Population," *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 26 April 1924, 43.

⁸ *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 5 April 1924, 35.

⁹ Stuart Oderman, *Lillian Gish: A Life on Stage and Screen* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 113-114.

London in May of 1923. The novel was first made into a film in 1915 starring Pauline Frederick, a Broadway actress in her first moving picture. In the original version, a faithful adaptation of Caine's novel, the main character, David, is a socialist. The 1923 remake, however, portrayed the character as a fascist. In 1919, producer Samuel Goldwyn had stolen Pauline Frederick, one of the biggest stars from Famous Players Studios, for his own studio and he would have been quite familiar with the original version of *The Eternal City* in which she had starred. Goldwyn produced this updated adaption for First National to have it take place in 1920s Italy. George Fitzmaurice's wife, Ouida Begere, wrote the scenario in collaboration with Caine and H.H. Bruenner, production company manager.

Some of the first film version was shot in Rome. *The New York Evening Journal* for April 17, 1915, reviewed one of the key scenes: "The Coliseum lying in ruins is made a center of one of the most stirring scenes where a mob of hundreds of people flee through its openings. It is a scene that is unbelievable, when one stops to think that the mob is modern and the soldiers are but modern after all." Soldiers would play a large role in the remake of *The Eternal City*; however the vast majority would not be actors, but real fascist soldiers.¹⁰

Mussolini delegated whole battalions of soldiers to serve as both guards and actors during the filming. Permission was given to the film crew to use the Forum and the Coliseum. In its review, *Moving Picture World* recounted that "...we find the hero David,

¹⁰ "Hal Caine's 'The Eternal City' Proves Great Spectacle," *Evening Journal*, 17 April 1915. Clipping from Margaret Herrick Library film files.

as the leader of the Fascisti in their successful struggle with the ‘Reds’ There are shots of Mussolini, the leader, and even a flash of the King of Italy, as well as scenes showing the triumph of the Fascisti.”¹¹

On a break from filming *The Eternal City*, the film’s principle actor, Lionel Barrymore, married actress Irene Fenwick in Rome at the suite of George Fitzmaurice in the Grand Hotel. So involved in the production of *The Eternal City* was Benito Mussolini that he actually attended their private ceremony. American Ambassador to Italy Richard Washburn Child (who was so impressed with Il Duce he would write the preface to his autobiography in 1928) was also present at the wedding. With Rome not far enough from the film crew, the new Mr. and Mrs. Barrymore chose Venice as their honeymoon spot.¹²

The movie caught a bit of scandal from the tabloids when the film’s female star Barbara LaMarr, reportedly adopted an Italian baby. Either the event was created in order to confuse the press or she was earnestly considering an adoption. On the other hand, LaMarr already had a baby from an earlier affair, the birth of which she had concocted as an “adoption” in order to save face.¹³

The film’s premiere on November 19, 1923 perhaps signaled a rebirth of the Italian image in America. *The Eternal City* opened to an anxious crowd that waited in lines around the block. The locale of the film’s premiere is particularly curious and may

¹¹ Charles S. Sewell, “Newest Reviews,” *Moving Picture World*, 1 December 1923.

¹² “Wedding of Lionel Barrymore and Irene Fenwick in Rome,” *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 28 July 1923, 372.

¹³ “Players We Know,” *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 22 September 1923, 771.

have been intentional considering it was neither New York nor Los Angeles but the textile town of Paterson, New Jersey, which had a large Italian population.¹⁴ Paterson was known in Italy as the socialist headquarters of Gaetano Bresci, an Italian immigrant who went back to Italy and assassinated King Umberto I in 1900.

More spectacular, however, was the west coast premiere at Grauman's Million Dollar Theater in Los Angeles, a star-studded opening that included William S. Hart, Charlie Chaplin, Gloria Swanson, Francis X. Bushman, Beverly Bayne, Sam Wood, and a host of others. Director George Fitzmaurice was present and received a standing ovation from the crowd.¹⁵ Gino Corrado was familiar with *The Eternal City* and may have attended its premier in Los Angeles as he was practically an insider—he appeared in another First National film, *Flaming Youth*, released only one month before *The Eternal City*.

Exhibitors—particularly those of Italian ancestry or in Italian-speaking sections in America—quickly learned to exploit *The Eternal City*'s Italian angle to profit from the immigrant market. For example, in New Haven, Connecticut (a heavily Italian-populated area)—where Tuscan-born exhibitor Sylvester Polli had headquartered the East Coast's largest theater-chain—a special showing was held for the Sons of Italy and other Italian societies. Even the local Italian consulate official was involved in promoting the film

¹⁴ “‘Eternal City’ Premiere Goes Big in Patterson,” *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 1 December 1923, 21.

¹⁵ “Spectacular Premiere for ‘Eternal City,’” *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 9 February 1924, 11.

through word of mouth.¹⁶ Though the film failed to create a consensus among Italian Americans in support of the new Fascist Italy, the hullabaloo it created in the immigrant community nonetheless meant good publicity. Mussolini commemorated the success of the picture in a telegraph to Fitzmaurice several months later. Referring to the disruptive strikes that had once plagued Italy which would have made filming there difficult for American companies, Mussolini declared, “Italy, by means of her gallant and strenuous Fascisti youth, has established order throughout towns and country. By a notable effort she has gained civic peace which allows her to work and progress.”¹⁷

The possibility of using Europe as a locale for American pictures as a means to cut production costs, while creating authentic backdrops, excited the American studios. Carl Laemmle, president of Universal Pictures, toured Europe in the summer of 1923, visiting Milan, Venice, and Florence among other cities. He brought back reports of the situation for American filmmakers. He found Italian production at a standstill with the exception of American companies filming on location. Several factors contributed to the situation: political instability, high exchange rates, and the inability of European producers to make pictures that appealed to the American market.¹⁸

Nevertheless, some film makers noticed a big difference in Italy after Mussolini rose to power. J. Gordon Edwards, a director for the William Fox Company who often

¹⁶ “‘The Eternal City’ Has Good Exploitation Angles,” *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 29 March 1924, 34.

¹⁷ “‘Eternal City’ Debut Brings Mussolini Cable,” *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 11 March 1924, 22.

¹⁸ “Laemmle Finds American Films Dominate the European Field,” *Moving Picture World*, 13 October 1923, 563.

worked in Europe, was amazed. In an interview reprinted in *Moving Picture World*, the director plainly said, “Not that I favor Fascism, but the country has improved 500 percent since the last time I was here.” Gordon also reported that the banks in Italy were cooperative in helping American companies make pictures there.¹⁹

Henry King, director of *The White Sister*, also went on-location the following year in Florence to make *Romola*, a film that Corrado later claimed he was offered a job as an art director. The movie based on the book was a romantic epic tale of Renaissance Florence that involved the Medici family, art, and royalty. And even better, the story featured pathbreaking sets, and despite the beautiful backdrop of the city itself, a set was built that covered 17 acres. Corrado likely convinced director Henry King that he had worked making props as a sculptor, had labored in constructing the Fair buildings in San Diego, and that he was of royal Florentine lineage, in order to land a position supervising the set building in Florence.

Ultimately, Corrado did not make the trip to Italy due to timing and other contractual obligations. He later recounted. “For some reason they couldn’t get me. I was tied up in a big picture and they wouldn’t let me go. As it was, I would have made two pictures in Florence as an Art Director [and] as a Technical Director, because my people were [a] very prominent ...royal Florentine family...”²⁰ Corrado may have indeed been offered two films being slated by King to be shot in Italy, one being *Romola* and,

¹⁹ “J. Gordon Edwards Tells of Picture Activities Abroad,” *Moving Picture World* 3 November 1923, 43.

²⁰ Gino Corrado interviewed by Bill Cappello, Van Nuys, CA, 4 May 1976, tape 1.

recounting these details in his last years, may have confused the other with *The White Sister* or another actually shot in Rome.

Henry King did speak positively about his experience in Italy when he cited several advantages of foreign locations at a meeting of the Associated Motion Picture Advertisers luncheon in New York. Foremost, King asserted, was the quality of the set design—so artistic were the sets of *Romola* that he lamented their destruction after the completion of the picture. Another advantage was the skilled electricians, always a major concern for motion picture directors, and King proclaimed those in Italy to be the best workmen he had yet met. *Romola* could not have been made on the same scale in America within the same budget, the director claimed, but—a comment on Italy’s lackluster technical motion picture resources—a director in a foreign country must consider himself a pioneer. King concluded, “You must not expect in the Sahara desert to find a fully equipped Hollywood studio.”²¹

If, at this point, Corrado had a desire to return to Italy for the sole purpose of advancing his acting career, it would have been folly. Corrado had the opportunity to appear in numerous big pictures in America and thus his likeness would have graced more screens in Italy by his staying in the United States. Conversely, though he may not have known it, Corrado had an impact on American film history by being based in Hollywood. One film made in Italy, whose American title was *After Six Days*, was outdone by a competitor, *Ten Commandments*, in which Corrado appeared.

²¹ “Director Henry King Says Censorship Has Helped Film Industry,” *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 9 August 1924, 35.

After Six Days was made in late 1921 in Italy and after a lengthy process was picked up for distribution in America by the Weiss Brothers' Artclass Films. *After Six Days* was a Biblical film that told the stories of the Old Testament in separate episodes from Adam and Eve to Song of Solomon. When first brought from Italy, the film was originally 600,000 feet in length, but it was cut down to 10,000 for an initial run as a road show for American audiences.²² Artclass Pictures promotional articles claimed that the movie's director, Antonio Garrezzo, (a virtual unknown, even in Italy), was "the Italian Griffith." Of special note was the authenticity of the picture which, according to trade magazine articles, included forty-one associate directors, thirty cameramen, and 15,000 extras in one scene. Promotional material also made sure to mention that the picture excelled beyond the quality of "the average film brought to this country from Italy during the past seven years."²³ The film took five years to make and was filmed in Palestine, Egypt, Rome, and other historic places mentioned in the Bible. A few weeks *After Six Days* ran as a road show, it was given three simultaneous runs in separate sections of New York City, an unusual scheme for its day. Showings in the Lower and Upper East Side carried introductions and subtitles in Italian and Yiddish to appeal to the Italian and Jewish viewers.²⁴

²² "Weiss on his Bible Feature," *Exhibitors Trade Review* 3 December 1921, 29.

²³ "Bible Production of Weiss Brothers Nears Completion," *Exhibitors Trade Review* 7 January 1922, 405.

²⁴ "Three New York Showings for Old Testament Film," *Exhibitors Trade Review* 28 January 1922, 607.

In his autobiography Cecil B. DeMille wrote about how he conducted a nationwide contest to gauge what the public wanted to see on the screen, and perhaps it was not coincidence that the winners selected had all asked for a biblical picture, specifically an Old Testament picture depicting the Ten Commandments.²⁵ Many of the attributes of the film *The Ten Commandments* were first found in *After Six Days*. A review of *After Six Days* in June 1922 described the film's spectacular mass effects and color tones of some of the episodes, traits that Cecil B. DeMille would copy and improve upon in several key scenes of *The Ten Commandments*. One of the main attractions of *After Six Days* was the familiarity the public had with the Bible. If biblical knowledge was a key factor in the marketing strategy of *After Six Days*, it was also important in *The Ten Commandments* and both films' marketing campaigns were similar, at one point openly challenging one another.

If there was one place where *After Six Days* surpassed *The Ten Commandments* it was the exterior sets: the film could claim to have used authentic locations for the biblical stories. After realizing Palestine was too expensive for *The Ten Commandments*, DeMille had his assistant director and cinematographer search the western United States for deserts, finally agreeing on the dunes in Guadalupe, eighty miles north of Santa Barbara, California. DeMille took no chances and had Rabbi Silverman of New York's largest synagogue supervise the filming of several key scenes, surely including those in

²⁵ Cecil B. DeMille, *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille*, edited by Donald Hayne (Edgewood Cliffs: NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959), 124.

which Corrado appeared.²⁶ Corrado played the biblical character of Joshua, a prominent role complete with close-ups. He did not receive credit on the screen. However, at several opening presentations of the film, a new way of giving billing to the actors was devised. Credits were projected on two pillars on the stage for the duration of the ten minutes after the curtains went up and before the start of the movie. Corrado's scene in *The Ten Commandments* is one of his best of the silent film era. Thdinaldough his lines were few, they were nonetheless important in the story, one inter-title has him pleading for the Jews to stop bowing to idols: "Seemeth it a small thing to you that we worship idols, forsaking the God that brought you out of Bondage. Save thy people I beseech thee! For they have done an abomination, and Aaron hath made them naked unto their shame!" (Exodus 32:25).

Perhaps a testament to the success of *After Six Days*, it was still playing when *The Ten Commandments* opened. Artclass Pictures bought full page advertisements in trade magazines to promote its film and to detract from *The Ten Commandments*. The headline read "*After Six Days* has *The Ten Commandments* licked!" and the ad claimed the film featured "Moses and the Ten Commandments." A quote from a reviewer used in the publicity added, "The Golden Calf episode is better done than it is in the Ten Commandments," a direct comment about what was then the greatest scene of Gino Corrado's career.²⁷ The ad campaign caused Famous-Players Lasky Corporation, the

²⁶ "Rabbi Visits DeMille," *Exhibitors Trade Review* 14, no. 6, 238.

²⁷ Full page advertisement for "After Six Days," *Exhibitors Trade Review* 28 June 1924, 7.

producers of *The Ten Commandments*, to file a suit against Artclass Pictures. The case went to the Supreme Court and an injunction was ordered against Artclass in their use of the words “The Ten Commandments” either as the title or as part of the title of a motion picture, and from using those words or the picture of Moses in advertising a motion picture. Famous-Players Lasky claimed that Artclass began using this deceptive advertising only after the success of *The Ten Commandments* with the intent to confuse theater patrons. The case also held theaters liable to legal action if they did not comply with the judge’s verdict. The landmark decision served as precedent in the motion picture world against copyright infringement.²⁸

²⁸ “Famous Wins Decision in ‘Commandments’ Title Case,” *Exhibitors Trade Review* 1 November 1924, 20.

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Weiss Brothers
take particular pride
in presenting

"After Six Days"

The most astounding
photo epic ever filmed
—a picture that has
broken every known
record in every house
it has been shown!



TWICE DAILY
2.15 and 8.15 P. M.

AUGMENTED ORCHESTRA

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IMPERIAL QUARTETTE



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Moses and the Ten Commandments

\$3,000,000.00 Entertainment for the Hundred Millions

ADMISSION TO ALL CHILDREN, 30c (Including Tax) AT ALL PERFORMANCES

An Artclass Pictures Corp. Production

18

Figure 5. *After Six Days* (1921) printed program. 2,500-seat Tremont Temple, Boston, circa 1923.

No expense was spared in the publicity campaign for the *Ten Commandments*. The largest electrical sign ever erected for a film (200 feet long) advertised the film's opening for its New York run.²⁹ The guests at the opening in New York included Gloria Swanson, William Randolph Hearst, Allan Dwan, and George Fitzmaurice. Also in attendance was the financier of the film, A.H. Giannini.³⁰ One indicator of the popularity of *The Ten Commandments* in Europe was illustrated by reports that the film received Germany's greatest reception ever for an American motion picture at a premiere in Berlin.³¹

American films dominated the Italian (and entire European) market in 1923 and 1924. The situation perplexed Mussolini, who, with the help of Italy's financiers, was determined to rebuild national prestige. After World War I, the Italian film industry was in serious decline. What was a thriving film industry, by 1923 could not even supply enough films for its own market, and over 50 percent were imported, mostly from the United States. Mussolini, the Italian government, and bankers were determined to restore the dignity of the national film industry and a company was organized for the purpose called "Propaganda Industriale Artistica Cinematografica Europea," headquartered in Turin.³²

²⁹ "Big Sign for the 'Ten Commandments'," *Exhibitors Trade Review* 12 January 1924, 13.

³⁰ "'Ten Commandments' has Brilliant New York Opening," *Exhibitors Trade Review* 5 January 1924, 10.

³¹ *Exhibitors Trade Review* 4 October 1924, 33.

³² "Griffith Goes to Rome for Production Conference on Great Italian Film," *Exhibitors Trade Review* 29 March 1924, 9.

In April 1924 none other than D.W. Griffith was invited to rehabilitate Italy's struggling film industry. Griffith was courted to produce an elaborate picture in Italy using an American production company and actors. Whether he was specifically consulted on how to improve Italian production and make films that appealed to the American market is unknown, but it is certainly a strong possibility. It was also a symbolic irony that Italy, the nation that gave the world Leonardo DaVinci and Michelangelo, was now seeking counsel from America regarding the arts.³³

The most ambitious production attempted in Italy was the American silent film version of *Ben Hur* (1925). The film's producer was Samuel Goldwyn, whose studio now merged with Metro to form MGM. *Ben Hur* was plagued with problems, including exceeding the original budget. Two months of shooting in Italy were scrapped and the production crew and actors returned to America. The film was reshot on the MGM lot and surrounding locations. The coliseum chariot race scene was the most expensive for its time (about \$250,000). One of the film's stars was Francis X. Bushman, who played the role of Messala. The multitude of extras included Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford as part of the crowd scene.³⁴ One wonders if Corrado was one of the thousands of extras employed by MGM for the chariot race.

³³ "Griffith Goes to Rome for Production Conference on Great Italian Film," *Exhibitors Trade Review* 29 March 1924, 9.

³⁴ Richard and Mary Buckingham Maturi, *Francis X. Bushman: A Biography and Filmography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998), 74.

CHAPTER SIX

MAJOR STUDIO OR MAJOR ROLE?:

THE STRATEGIES OF A WORKING ACTOR IN 1920S HOLLYWOOD

Until 1923, most of the pictures Corrado had appeared in were mildly successful at best. Though Corrado's salary was quite high when he was working—about \$100 a week on average—he must have barely scraped by working as an actor with pictures far and few between and roles so small. What happened next characterized the actor's work and gave Gino Corrado's career longevity: he would play small parts in highly successful films, many of which forever epitomized their genre.¹

Corrado's big break came when director Cecil B. DeMille cast him in *The Ten Commandments* in 1923. The picture cost almost one-and-a-half million dollars and was one of the most expensive movies ever made up to that time. DeMille, like D. W. Griffith, also traced his inspiration for making epic pictures to Italian films such as *Cabiria*, which gave him his first concept of “photographing massive movements, whole battles, whole cities, whole nations almost.”² The cast of extras included 2,500 people and 3,000 animals. The set was built in Hollywood and was so massive that when transported it had to be disassembled to get under bridges. Once filming was finished, it was buried in the sand on location in Guadalupe, near Santa Barbara, California.

¹ Contract for Gene Corey's (Corrado's) employment with the William Fox Vaudeville Co., Hollywood, CA dated 22 August, 1922. Salary arrangements indicate \$100 a week. GCC.

² DeMille, *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille*, 124.

Corrado played the part of Joshua, and *The Ten Commandments* was a huge success which grossed \$4.1 million dollars. Though Corrado had a small part, the big picture gave the actor wider exposure and greater visibility. The actor was billed as “Geno Corrado” (with a temporary spelling) because DeMille liked the musical sound of it. He would go on to appear in at least two other DeMille pictures: *Adam’s Rib* (1923) and later *The Volga Boatman* (1926). Corrado also claimed to have appeared in *Forbidden Fruit* as the character Adam, and, perhaps a clue to his wanting to become an art director, he claimed that DeMille had taken suggestions from Corrado over his art department for a scene in a film, title unknown, where the actor advised DeMille to have some crocodiles brushed with grease to make them shine and photograph as more ferocious. Corrado likely admired DeMille and would later say of the director that he was a “A great man,”³

An example of Corrado’s growing international appeal was his appearance in a short Mexican film photographed on the Paramount Studios lot (where the Famous Players-Lasky production unit worked). The “behind-the scenes” film was called *Honaria Suarez en Hollywood* and consisted of scenes of Mexican producer Honaria Suarez being shown around the studio by Spanish matinee idol Antonio Moreno, watching several films being shot, chatting with Cecil B. DeMille, and finally, appearing in a short screen test for *Adam’s Rib* opposite Corrado where she plays a betrayed wife. The short was produced during a long battle throughout the 1920s between the Mexican government and the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA),

³ Corrado interview with Bill Cappello, 1973. DeMille, *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille*, 249-268.

headed by Will Hays, regarding the denigration of Mexicans on-screen. When Paramount refused to withdraw a movie from exhibition in Mexico considered offensive, the president of Mexico issued a decree that banned all Paramount films, which encompassed those of Famous Players-Lasky and eventually several other companies. *Honaria Suarez en Hollywood* served as a sympathetic depiction of Hollywood that was financed by the largest theater chain in Mexico City, Circuito Olympia, (with over 200 employees, the chain had the most to lose in an embargo and who had promised the Mexican authorities to not show any banned films). The film debuted at Circuito Olympia's largest theater the following year on June 13, 1924.⁴

In 1923, Corrado appeared with actress Colleen Moore in *Flaming Youth*. For the film the actress cut her hair in a style known as a "Dutch Bob" (a tight bob with short, even bangs). The picture made Moore a star and put the word "flapper" into the English vocabulary. *Flaming Youth* triumphed in Europe and Moore promoted the film on a European tour. Upon her return to the States, the actress met with all the studio bosses who, she later wrote, were "so happy over the money they'd made on *Flaming Youth*, they tore up my old contract and gave me a new one for \$50,000 a picture for the next four pictures, all of them to be made in a year. I didn't get excited until I broke it down

⁴ Aurelio de los Reyes, *Filmografia del cine mudo mexicano, Volumen II, 1920-1924* (Mexico, DF: Direccion General de Actividades Cinematograficas, 1994), 254-255. Special thanks to Laura Isabel Serna for sharing this information. See also Laura Isabel Serna, "'As a Mexican I Feel It's My Duty:' Citizenship, Censorship, and the Campaign Against Derogatory Films in Mexico, 1922-1930," *The Americas*, October 2006, 230; 235-236; and Gizka S. de Usabel, *The High Noon of American Films in Latin America* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), 40-41.

and saw that it came to almost \$4000 a week.”⁵ Seventy-five members of the press and leaders of the industry attended the meeting to toast the success of the picture including general manager of First National Pictures, Richard A. Rowland.⁶ Interestingly, Corrado appeared with the actress in previous films, *A Roman Scandal* in 1919, and a 1920 comedy titled *Her Bridal Nightmare* where Corrado was billed above the future star. This was not the case for *Flaming Youth*. On the one-sheet poster for the film, five actors were listed (at half the font size of Moore), followed by “and many others” meant for Corrado and the remaining bit players.

According to his contracts of 1923, Corrado’s salary increased to \$150 a week, which was still high compared to the average worker in America but paled in comparison to what many stars were earning in Hollywood. The highest paid actors Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks earned salaries were almost too much for any one studio to accommodate (thus they had joined Mary Pickford to form their own studio). For comparison, the weekly salaries of several of the top featured players were revealing.⁷ Corrado had either worked with or would soon work with some of them.

⁵ Colleen Moore, *Silent Star* (New York: DoubleDay and Co., 1968), 138.

⁶ “Flaming Youth Luncheon” *Moving Picture World* 22 December 1923, 690. The place and date of the luncheon were not mentioned in Moore’s autobiography, but must have been at the Ritz Carlton in New York on December 11, 1923.

⁷ “Cut Stars Salaries Radically or Get New Faces, Urge Brandt,” *Moving Picture World*, 10 November 1923, 217.

Male leads:

Larry Semon \$5,000

Tom Mix \$4,000

Richard Barthelmess \$2,500

Wallace Beery \$2,500

Lon Chaney \$1,750

Jack Holt \$1,500

Noah Beery \$1,500

Richard Dix \$1,250

Al St. John \$1,000

Female leads:

Pauline Frederick \$10,000

Norma Talmadge \$10,000

Dorothy Dalton \$7,500

Gloria Swanson \$6,500

Constance Talmadge \$5,000

Lillian Gish \$5,000

Betty Compson \$3,500

Mabel Normand \$3,000

Mae Marsh \$1,500

These salaries prompted some motion picture distributors to claim they had a hard time making a profit because exhibitors' and theaters' fees were so high. William

Brandt, president of the Motion Picture Theatre Owners in New York, bolstered this accusation by pointing out that salaries of the actors accounted for a large percentage of the production cost of a feature film and claimed that “these services are clearly out of proportion to the services rendered in similar professions and should be readjusted immediately.”⁸ At least one motion picture executive counter-claimed that the industry was not hurt by salaries when he replied that “any one will admit that to put names of players who are proven successes into a picture is added insurance against failure.”⁹ If Corrado wanted stardom, he would first have to guarantee his name was in the credits and on the publicity material. One way to do this was with the new independent studios springing up in an area in Hollywood on Gower Street nicknamed Poverty Row.

In 1924 Corrado signed a contract at Bud Barsky Productions in Hollywood, one of the smaller studios, where the actor played bigger roles. Five films were made: *Reckless Speed* (1924), *South of the Equator* (1924), *He Who Laughs Last* (1925), *The Coast Patrol* (1925), and *Speed Madness* (1925). *South of the Equator* got the best reviews, such as in *Motion Picture News*:

While this presents nothing new in plot and action; the idea being established on conflict between revolutionists and ruling powers, it manages to carry a punch in its incident. Has suspense. Is adequately acted and staged with proper atmosphere. Has cast that works to put it over.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “Industry Not Hurt by Salaries Paid to the Stars,” *Moving Picture World* 24 November 1923, 374.

¹⁰ *Motion Picture News*, 18 October 1924, 12. Corrado is billed here as Gene Corey for the last time.

South of the Equator was given a tiny budget even by the standards of the 1920s, and it was astonishing that the film got any encouraging reviews at all. According to Barsky Production accounting records, the film cost a mere \$3,166 to produce, broken down as follows:

\$205 Paid for the story.

\$825 Director and staff.

\$236 Cameramen salaries.

\$553 Extra talent.

\$1347 Cast salaries.¹¹

No longer a bit player, Corrado was a star, albeit a B-movie star at best. Barsky Productions consisted of four separate production units, each a vehicle for its own star and supporting actors, all of whom were weekly salaried. The units were: the Kenneth McDonald Company that specialized in high society dramas, the Hercules comedy unit starring Frank Merrill, the Barsky All-Star Special Features (that combined the best actors from each), and the O.K. Film Company starring “Geno Corrado” in romantic adventures.¹²

In *The Coast Patrol* (1925), Corrado co-starred, playing a villain who heads a smuggling ring. Kenneth McDonald plays a federal agent who captures him. The picture featured a very young Fay Wray (famous for her later role in *King Kong*) in her first

¹¹ General Ledger “Assets,” Bud Barky Collection, Box 11, Folder 271, Margaret Herrick Library.

¹² “High Prices Target for Bud Barsky,” Bud Barky Collection, Box 11, Folder 271, Scrapbook. Margaret Herrick Library.

major on-screen appearance. The press-book for *The Coast Patrol* touts it as “one of the most spectacular ever attempted by an independent producer.” The film, with its poor storyline and sloppy editing, was not a financial success at the box office.¹³

Barsky’s productions were independent budget films that relied heavily upon slick advertising for their distribution. Perhaps in an attempt to prey upon any unknowledgeable exhibitors who sought Valentino-like Latin Lover pictures, Corrado was intrepidly promoted in Barsky’s publicity as the “screen’s greatest lover.”¹⁴ Though Barsky Pictures touted the company as bringing pictures back to the masses, its films soon fell out of favor with the public. By 1925 Barsky Productions was only releasing a couple of budget features a year including pictures starring Kenneth McDonald, and Al Hoxie westerns. At this time Corrado was released from his contract at the studio.¹⁵ Barsky and Corrado signed an “agreement of cancellation” contract dated March 23, 1925. Perhaps it was a formality as Corrado had already signed an acceptance of employment with First National Productions on January 22. Also possible: Barsky in mid-1924 did not let Corrado out of his contract—or loaned him out—to go to Italy as an Art Director for the making of *Romola*. Corrado had evidently toyed with the idea of

¹³ *The Coast Patrol* pressbook, undated, released when film opened. 1-5. GCC.

¹⁴ Promotional flyer promoting Barsky Productions. Bud Barky Collection, Box 11, Folder 271, Margaret Herrick Library.

¹⁵ General Ledger “Expenses” Account E-13, Section C, Bud Barky Collection, Margaret Herrick Library.

becoming a B-movie star by working with Barsky, but apparently gave up on the idea, having become established as a well-known supporting actor.¹⁶

An example of Corrado's now growing popularity was his status in both the motion picture and the Italian communities. An invitation to a performance at the International Artists Club in Los Angeles on June 28, 1924 showed thirty-six "guests of honor" in attendance. The guest list was a who's who of the motion picture community, and listed several political dignitaries, mostly from local consulates. Several of those listed were Italian representatives. A mark of success in the film industry is that Gino Corrado made the list. Some of the other dignitaries listed included:

Dr. Wallace Douglas, President of the Los Angeles Opera Club

Princess Helenka Zaruba

Count Carricciola DiMelito, "Mario Carillo"

Robert Vignola, Director, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Nita Naldi, Star of *The Ten Commandments*

Ernst Lubitsch, Director at Warner Brothers

Homer Grunn, Composer

Chief Standing Bear, Chief of the Sioux Tribe

Cavalier Enrico Piana, Italian Consul

Ramon Navarro, Star¹⁷

¹⁶ Both contracts in the author's possession. GCC.

¹⁷ International Artist Club program for Oriental Night, 28 June 1924 at St. Ritus Benda in Los Angeles. Corrado is listed as one of 36 guests of honor on first page. GCC.

Corrado was moving in the right circles to cultivate a big contract in a huge Hollywood picture. He was rubbing elbows with the highest paid directors at the time and friendly with some of the movers and shakers of Los Angeles, such as Enrico Piana, the city's first Italian consul, appointed by Mussolini. The actor was on his way up and everyone around him must have also believed he was headed for success.

Bolstering his rising image in the Italian community, Corrado was receiving accolades by the press. *Il Carroccio*, a nationwide magazine devoted to Italian political and cultural life in America that was published in New York (a kind of *Time* magazine for Italian immigrants), announced a movie in which Corrado had a lead, praising his performance, and giving its readers the inside that "Gino Corrado" was a stage name and the real surname of this Florentine actor was Liserani.¹⁸

A *Los Angeles Times* article in the entertainment section made mention of Corrado's talent "as an erstwhile portrayer of everything from sympathetic Mexicans to synthetic Portuguese."¹⁹ Also evident in the write-up is a clear attempt by him (or the studio press agent who supplied the information) to mold his image by establishing his versatility, refinement, and his *Italianita*. Though Corrado had no direct lineage to the Italian stage, the article stressed his early attraction to the Italian theater, mentioning that Corrado "apprenticed himself to the calling of the great Salvini" who was playing in

¹⁸ *Il Carroccio* (the Italian Review) , vol. 19, 1924, 677.

¹⁹ *Los Angeles Times* 7 June, 1925, E15.

Rome. The last paragraph uses poetic license and evokes a famous Florentine explorer in telling the readers about Corrado's immigration trail:

[I]n Corrado's veins flowed the blood of Amerigo Vespucci, the enterprising gentleman to whom we credit the discovery of our country. Like Vespucci, he felt the westward urge and satisfied it by coming to Hollywood. And now he is well on the way to fame as a portrayer of "distinctive characterizations."²⁰

Interestingly, Corrado comparable to a refined gentleman than many other actors who were desperately trying to shape their careers into such an image. Indeed, Corrado attended seminary school, had a wealthy uncle (by this time residing on Chicago's opulent Michigan Avenue) and family members that were successful opera singers. He had worked with renowned sculptors, spent his boyhood enjoying the splendors of Florence, and was tutored on the violin.

As for musical ability, Corrado was tutored on the instrument as a youth, played violin as a hobby, and apparently had some skill. His favorite music was opera, and a personally inscribed photograph of Enrico Caruso attests to his devotion to the world's greatest tenor. Several men in Corrado's family were professional opera singers, including a cousin that achieved some fame having played the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Corrado's ear for music led him to help a young friend of his who played violin in an Italian café near Central Casting Office get work at a picture studio. The violinist was Russ Colombo who serenaded for tip money at Gigi's, his family-run small eatery which was decorated with actors' 8x 10 photos (perhaps Corrado's as well) taken by a well-known Hollywood professional photographer a few doors down. Upon hearing

²⁰ Ibid. See also *Los Angeles Times* 8 July 1925, A9.

the youth—a fan of Puccini—play his violin beautifully, Corrado introduced Colombo to someone at Paramount. This meeting resulted in a paying gig to play mood music for actors during filming (mainly that of love scenes), an early start to a career for one of the world's top crooners who only a few years later would be rivaling both Bing Crosby and Frankie Vallee.²¹

Different actors negotiated their Italianess differently. Studios sometimes changed an actor's ethnicity to suit the current public's sensibilities, and there are examples of publicity that made actors seem more Italian to movie-goers. In 1911—just after Corrado had left the Windy City to go out west—Dolores Cassinelli had secured a contract in what would be the first of many pictures with Chicago's Essanay studios, often paired with leading man Francis X. Bushman. Born in Chicago of Italian parents, Cassinelli was further exoticized in Essanay Film Company's publicity that reported her birthplace as Genoa, Italy. The Italian-language press in Chicago was always supportive of Cassinelli; one paper wished the film actress success when she was to make her stage debut in 1917, performing at the Garrick Theatre in Chicago in a musical comedy called *The Grass Widow*.²²

Some effort was used by studios to promote and exoticize the city of Florence as an epicenter of art and culture and thus refinement. Theda Bara was one thespian

²¹ Joseph Lanza and Dennis Penna, *Russ Colombo and the Crooner Mystique* (Los Angeles, CA: Feral House), 2002, 27. See also Tony Toran, *A Prisoner of Love: The Definitive Story of Russ Colombo* (Boalsburg, PA: Bearmanor Media, 2006), 131-132.

²² *L'Italia* 9 September, 1917. Chicago Foreign Press Survey, Box 27.

whose widely circulated publicity campaign asserted that she was born in Florence. Her ascent to super-stardom was followed by her reincarnation at the hand of Fox Studio publicity agents. Not only did the actress claim she hailed from Corrado's ascribed hometown, but furthermore, that she was the daughter of a noted Florentine painter and sculptor. Just after the young Corrado arrived in Hollywood, he began working as Eugene Corey. Corrado felt obligated to take on an Anglo name due to conventions of the day.²³ For the purpose of creating an exotic stage persona (and less so as to obscure her own ethnic roots), Theda Bara appropriated Corrado's heritage, though she was in actuality born Theodosia Goodman, the daughter of a Jewish small-scale garment manufacturer in Cincinnati. One wonders if Corrado's self-image was in some way affected by Bara, because he later changed his name and began to play up his Italian heritage, stressing his birthplace as Florence, though technically it was nearby Pisa.²⁴

At least one Italian actor that was actually born in Florence, but upon arrival in Hollywood—after a short stint acting in Germany—was advised by the publicity department at Paramount to change his name, in similar fashion as Corrado in his early career, from Lido Manetti to “Arnold Kent.” The move was meant to appeal to the American moviegoer's inability of proper pronunciation of Italian, but was viewed from Paramount's branch in Rome as an attempt at erasing the Italian heritage of the actor, and a threat of a boycott of any films in which the actor appeared was issued. The studio's

²³ Ronald Genini, *Theda Bara: A Biography of the Silent Screen Vamp with a Filmography*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996), 19.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

solution was curious: the actor would be billed only in America as Arnold Kent, but in Italy and Europe (as he was already known), Lido Manetti.²⁵

American actress Nita Naldi went so far as to fictionalize her biography for her publicity as a Florentine who was distant kin to Dante's Beatrice. She was in reality born Donna Dooley to Irish immigrant parents in New York. The actress starred in *The Ten Commandments* but was soon marketed as the "female Valentino" after appearing opposite the famed actor in three films.²⁶ Nationality became an issue for Rudolph Valentino where there was controversy in Italy. When the actor applied for American citizenship, a movement in Rome emerged to boycott his films, but was personally ordered to be discontinued by Mussolini.²⁷ As the most successful Italian actor in Hollywood, Valentino's press releases made the immigrant of humble origins seem as though he had been born into high society.

Movie stars were the new models of personality and were capable of selling products; their images were developed so that they seemed naturally charming. Throughout the 1920s, the relationship between corporations, fan magazines and the

²⁵ "Actor Has Two Names for Screen," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 June 1927.

²⁶ Diane Negra, "The Fictionalized Ethnic Biography: Nita Naldi and the Crisis of Assimilation," in Gregg Bachman and Thomas J. Slater (eds.) *American Silent Film: Discovering Marginalized Voices*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 176-177.

²⁷ "Valentino Film Howled Down by Italians," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 January 1926, 1.

movie industry solidified. The advertising industry invited Hollywood to help them sell consumer goods—but what could Corrado sell?²⁸

Though it seems no endorsement contracts were ever awarded to Corrado, logical sponsors were the Italian food importers or manufacturers. This kind of pandering to Italian-Americans by Hollywood was not unknown, at least for a news story. Henry King, the director of *The White Sister* (1923) that was filmed in Italy, should have instilled the idea in Corrado a few years earlier when sending out a press release that made it into the movieland gossip column sections in newspapers. King claimed that while making preparations for *Romola* on location in Florence, he could not find the exact kind of spaghetti he liked at a certain restaurant. The chef let him go into the kitchen and cook his own and liked it so much he put the dish on the menu, naming it after the director—“Spaghetti Enrico Re.”²⁹

Corrado’s brother, Luigi Liserani, known briefly by his stage name as Louis Dumar, also had a connection in food. Around the mid-twenties, Liserani had opted to get out of the movie acting business after only landing a few small roles. Though still listed in the Los Angeles telephone directory as an actor until 1926, he had entered a career in the food catering business. His connections at movie studios proved useful as he became a steward at Munchers Café—the Fox Studios commissary—and soon became its

²⁸ Samantha Barbas, *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). 44-45; 76-78.

²⁹ *Nashville Tennessean* 28 October, 1923, 2.

manager. Here, Liserani gathered experience and information which proved useful for both he and his brother.

In 1925 Corrado's acting career ascended with roles such as the Mexican character of José in a western titled *The Desert Flower* produced by First National. By then the film's star, Colleen Moore, was one of the top paid actress in Hollywood. Parts of *The Desert Flower* were filmed in the desert town of Barstow, California, and Corrado witnessed the filming of one scene in which Moore was supposed to pump the train handcar. She accidentally fell and broke her neck. The young actress was out of commission for six months while she recuperated.³⁰

Though Corrado was living a good life as a character actor, he just needed one more break to achieve bona fide stardom. He had appeared in five films released in 1924, including *Men* with starlet Pola Negri. In 1925 Corrado appeared in nine movies. By 1926, the yearly total was at least eleven pictures and the storylines were better, with all the pictures being top-notch productions by major studios. Corrado was now being utilized as a character actor and his roles were varied, stretching his acting talents almost to the limit. In *The White Black Sheep* (1926), Corrado plays El Rahib, an Arab sheik. *Variety* gave the film a negative review, but praised Corrado as standing out.³¹ *The Amateur Gentleman* (1926) has Corrado cast as Prince Regent, English royalty.

³⁰ Moore, *Silent Star*, 180.

³¹ *Variety* 22 December 1926, 15. The reviewer wrote: "...Gino Corrado and Albert Prisco as the leaders of the revolting natives that stand out. None of the others means very much."

A newly centralized studio casting system implemented in Hollywood worked well for actors of Corrado's caliber. However, this was not the case for many lesser-known character actors and bit players. One actor voiced his dissent in a letter to the editor of a trade magazine by asking: "Why am I unable to earn a living as an actor in the movies, after fourteen months in Hollywood?" This same actor claimed to have been a distinctive personality from the vaudeville stage, a world traveler, and although not amazingly attractive, he photographed well and was labeled by agents as "interesting looking." Without the privilege of speaking to directors, as the current protocol would demand, he now spent excessive time on the phone to the casting department. He wrote, "It would seem that here they have developed a very efficient office system: almost before I can get my name spoken, the sweet young thing comes back with, 'nothing in,' perhaps this is true, but she gives the information darn quick, it seems to some of us." He had appeared in eight pictures for the year (only one less than Corrado), working each one usually for only a few days—often just one day. Some reasons suggested by friends for his failure were listed, suggesting actors' perceptions of the biases inherent in the film industry. At the top was "you are not a Jew," followed by "not a Catholic, a Christian Scientist, a lodge member, a legion member, or a foreigner." Also listed was "not a mixer"—perhaps a comment on networking through social drinking, night-clubbing, and party-going—an essential for someone in the industry, especially someone perceived as unconnected. The actor concluded, "at from \$7.50 to \$15.00 per day, take the average, say 25 days at \$10.00 a day and you can see why I am unable to earn a living."³²

³² "An Actor Writes of Casting Conditions," *The Film Mercury*, 14 May 1926, 5. The actor merely listed

In a cutthroat industry, Corrado was fortunate to have a “name” that was in demand. His rate was now about \$200 per week and he must have worked from seven to fourteen days per production. Though his parts were sometimes minor, he now was almost always credited on-screen. Corrado appeared in several of the year’s popular films and for the first time began to receive fan mail. One female well-wisher from Oklahoma had written the actor care of Colleen Moore. The letter is indicative of the silent film era when she told Corrado: “you are one of the cleverest pantomimists in the business. You can do more things with one turn of the wrist than some actors could grimace on 10,000 feet of celluloid with a couple of prompters to help.”³³

Along with fandom, part of the Hollywood lifestyle associated with actors, particularly throughout the 1920s Prohibition period, included a nightlife of wild debauchery. However, Corrado later gave a different opinion on this part of the business:

People that don’t deserve the credit get successful in pictures. That’s the truth. I know people that got started because [...] some actor was living with some woman and [she] furnished the money to entertain the people at home (the parties with liquor and everything else) and they made friends that way. I don’t like that. I went to parties that were serving drinks. I took my drink away—I didn’t drink it. And when the party got rough, I went out the door—I went home. I never joined them. I never liked those rough parties. I was never drunk in my life anyway. Never. I drink my wine with my meals.³⁴

Corrado probably did much of his social networking at home hosting his own small dinner parties. But in this period Corrado attended at least a few lavish parties of

his initials as “R.L.”

³³ Correspondence, Thelma Andrews (Oklahoma City) to Gino Corrado, 23 February 1927. In the letter Andrews flatters Corrado and requests a signed photograph. GCC.

³⁴ Bill Cappello interview with Gino Corrado, 4 May, 1976. Tape 2.

the cinema-land society, which, besides being a place to network, was an important function for obtaining free publicity, as newspapers had whole column sections dedicated to such events.³⁵ These industry parties were also a place to learn the tricks of the trade. The conversation at these parties, noted a then unknown George Raft, usually revolved around overnight success and how these directors, producers, and actors who were recently broke and struggling were now hosting governors and buying ranches or mansions.³⁶

An example of a party that Corrado was invited to was director Sidney Olcott's birthday party at director Robert Vignola's home, which also included actress Belle Bennett and popular Denmark-born actor Jean Hersholt in attendance.³⁷ Corrado became friends with Sidney Olcott who had directed Corrado in two films in 1926 (and also directed Corrado's brother in *The Only Woman* in 1924). Another fete where Corrado and his wife appeared on the guest list was an Irish-themed costume party for Olcott at the Hollywood Athletic Club.³⁸

No doubt Olcott had interesting information to pass to Corrado given his international experience as a recent director and studio head in Ireland. As Britain enacted quotas to restrict the number of American movies on British screens, *Motion*

³⁵ Bill Cappello interview with Gino Corrado, 4 May 1976. Tape 1. Horace McCoy, actor and fiction writer wrote that "Coming to parties is like buying an ad in the trade papers." See Horace McCoy, *I Should Have Stayed Home* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), 28.

³⁶ Lewis Yablonsky, *George Raft* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), 57.

³⁷ Isabel Stuvesant, "Society of Cinemaland," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 September 1926, C10.

³⁸ Myrna Nye, "Society of Cinemaland," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 April 1927, C14.

Picture News made a prediction for its readers that “a good many studio folk from America, particularly those of British birth, will eventually be seen in pictures made by the revived industry.”³⁹ Indeed, among those cabled with offers from London was Canadian-born Olcott. Before departing the following year to join British Lion Pictures, the director became an official spokesman on the matter of Hollywood actors and technical people moving to Europe and vice versa (those Europeans who immigrated to America). Olcott may have cautioned Corrado about working in Italy without first securing a contract just as he told reporters in several trade publications to “warn actors and directors about going to foreign countries on speculation.”⁴⁰

Actors were considered “artists” in a clause in immigration regulations and not subject to normal immigration law. The classification also included musicians and theatrical directors though there was heated debate between the unions and immigration authorities on both sides of the Atlantic as to exactly which workers were to be considered artists or merely contract workers. In reality, numerous emigrated foreign players in Hollywood failed at getting any stage or screen time at all, but the quick ascent in Hollywood of newly-arrived actors, such as Lupe Velez from Mexico and Greta Garbo from Sweden, prompted the Actor’s Equity Association to demand a curb to immigration. The Actor’s Equity Association proposed the exclusion of alien players by having immigration inspectors carefully examine foreign actors’ credentials and deport any

³⁹ *Motion Picture News*, 9 December 1927, 1803.

⁴⁰ “Sidney Olcott Gives Advice to European Job-Seekers,” *Moving Picture News*, 20 October 1928, 1215. See also *Moving Picture News*, 23 December 1927, 1947.

illegal residents (a measure suggested after the British Ministry of Labor enacting protective measures against Americans competing with British stage actors in London.) After much debate, the Actor's Equity Association—the largest union of screen actors until the formation of International Association of Stage and Theater Employees (IATSE) a year later—soundly retracted the resolution, as it was particularly unpopular with foreign-born actors, with opposition led by Rod La Roque, the husband of Norwegian star Vilma Banky.⁴¹

Possibly implicating actors like Corrado, one editor of a newspaper in Lebanon, Pennsylvania wrote: “Hundred per cent Americans, who read that there were 425 alien-born directors and players in the American films, will begin to find flaws in American movies now that they can blame it on a foreign invasion.” Quick to notice an opportunity for a rebuttal to the foreign press and their constant lauding of the influence of American movies, the editorial warned that those Europeans that hold responsible the ills of the world on the popularity of American films can trace the culture back to *themselves*.⁴²

Actor Conrad Veidt was one of twenty actors from Germany that entered the United States in the 1927 fiscal year making a total 196 foreign actors for a record breaking year, with most actors hailing from Latin America.⁴³ Veidt, who was trained by Germany's preeminent stage director Max Reinhardt in Berlin, claimed it was more of

⁴¹ “Hollywood to Drop its Fight on Foreigners,” *The Amarillo Globe* (Texas), 5 December 1927, 5. “Equity Plans Curb Against Alien Actors,” *Oakland Tribune*, 20 March 1928, 25.

⁴² *Lebanon Daily News* (Pennsylvania), 6 August 1927, 6.

⁴³ “196 Foreign Actors Entering U.S. in Year,” *Syracuse Herald*, 16 December 1928, 54.

an international exchange than a foreign invasion, as he learned many things in Hollywood and any American actor would “go through the same experience in Germany.” Veidt added, “It is impossible to try and confine the motion picture to any locality or any country, the movie is an international institution and will always be.”⁴⁴

If one of Corrado’s cousins back in Florence wanted to “invade” Hollywood to become an actor, where could they go? An Italian immigrant who knew no English could get film training in America. There were a few Italian-language companies located on the East Coast, mainly in New York City around the city’s Italian section.⁴⁵ Madina Pictures was led by film pioneer Filoteo Alberini, the Thomas Edison of Italy (mentioned previously on page 33) and an American director formerly of Ince Studios in Culver City: Burton King. The New York-based company sent Italian-language mailers that exhorted interested individuals to buy stock in the company (payable to the bank “Italian Discount and Trust Company, Harlem Branch”). Thirty shares, the mailer reasoned, would guarantee an aspiring applicant the “possibility to realize your dream and begin your career in film.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Record-Argus* (Greenville, PA), 24 August 1927, 1. Conrad Veidt also said, “Of course, America leads and may continue to do so. This is because America is the financial center.”

⁴⁵ Cassio Producing Film Company was at 212 East 14th Street and Madina Pictures was at 987 Eighth Avenue. Sicania Film Corp. was headquartered at 174 2nd Avenue but had branches at in Philadelphia; New Haven; Rome (Italy); and Valetta, Malta.

⁴⁶ Letter/mailer typed in Italian, undated (envelope postmarked 14 March 1925), from Comm. F. Alberini, President of Madina Pictures Inc., sent to Charles Broccoli of Vandergrift Pennsylvania. “Trenta azioni bastano perche voi possiate realizzare i vostri sogni ed entrare nella carrier cinematografica.” In the author’s possession. According to *New York Times*, 22 February 1924, 26, the company was incorporated with \$100,000 by Eugene Di Napoli, Treasurer and Lewis I. Maisell, Secretary.

The Cassio Producing Film Company was another studio that targeted the Italian immigrant. The studio also was also headquartered in New York and when Vitagraph Studio moved to Hollywood, Cassio shot several comedy short series at their old studio.⁴⁷ Cassio's founders were two Italian brothers by the name of Nicassio, so one can surmise that the company's name derived from a shortened version of the family name. Potential actors for the company were asked to send a money order for \$30, along with three 8x10 headshots, for a course comprised of fifty lessons in Italian. Some of these lessons were:

Number 14: "Terminology of the studio."

Number 17: "150 expressions of a dramatic artist."

Number 38: "How to dress for dinner."

Number 50: "Where the film studios are located."⁴⁸

Another option for those Italians that wanted the most stable movie career was Brown's School for Motion Picture Operators. The school had an Italian department where for \$35 one could complete day or evening classes in English and Italian. A projectionist—the person managing the film projectors— was considered an important part of the film exhibition profession, and the artistry in the projection room demanded the showing of films in harmony with the spirit of the theater's often extravagant

⁴⁷ *Syracuse Journal*, 27 January 1926, 20. *The Piano Movers* was the 12 part comedy with the lead played by Dedic Velde. The company was incorporated with \$100,000 by T. Nicassio (President), F. Nicassio (Secretary and Treasurer), and L. Lore, Vice-President. See *New York Times* "New Incorporations," 1 February 1925, S7.

⁴⁸ Two-page letter, in Italian, dated 26 September 1925 from "la direzione," Cassio Film Company, sent to Charles Broccoli in Vandergrift, Pennsylvania. In the author's possession.

atmosphere. The Brown School for Motion Picture Operators response to an applicant claimed (in Italian) that the “graduates of our school have occupied first-class jobs at the better theaters, and are receiving a fine salary.”⁴⁹

Few Italian actors immigrated to America in the 1920s in comparison to other nationalities. This is surprising when considering the handful of small Italian-managed production companies in New York City. Though all of these production houses were initially capitalized at \$100,000, none produced highly successful films nor turned out any stars; they were dissolved after a few years probably for lack of financing.⁵⁰

By 1927 there was a foreign exodus of actors leaving America—280 in total.⁵¹ Adding to the exchange of talent were several American actors who had been courted by European film companies. One such actor was the popular Italian-born comedian Mario Bianchi, a veteran of the American screen better known as Monty Banks after his Keystone Comedies roles, who signed a contract with British International Pictures.⁵² Corrado probably knew the actor quite well as they looked alike and had similar stories—

⁴⁹ Form letter, in Italian, from Brown’s School for Motion Picture Operators, New York, dated 19 February 1925; signed by F. Crimi, Italian Department. “Gli student che escono graduate dalla nostra Scuola, occupano dei posti di prima classe nei migliori Teatri, e ricevono un buonissimo salario.” In the author’s possession. See also R. B. Dugan and M.V. Phillips, in collaboration with the Technical Advisory Departments of the California Sound Studios, “Filming the Talking Picture,” (promotional pamphlet printed in Hollywood, CA, circa 1931), 8. Also in the author’s possession.

⁵⁰ Ibid. All the letterheads from Italian film studios in New York mentioned previously had the same claim of “Capitalized at \$100,000.”

⁵¹ “Foreign Exodus,” *Billings Gazette*, 29 January 1928, 18.

⁵² Davide Turconi, *Monty Banks: biofilmografia* (Cesna: Centro Cinema Citta di Cesna, 1987), 24-25. Banks was signed in March of 1928 by British International Pictures after the passage of the Cinematographic Film Act of 1927—a measure meant to limit foreign film imports, as well as stimulate the British film industry.

Banks being renamed for the American screen by director Howard Hawks while at Triangle Pictures. Banks' career may have been inspiring to Corrado, as the ambitious Banks wore many hats, rising up the ladder to become producer, later, executive producer, and while in Britain gained the opportunity to direct major productions—all the while continuing in his craft as an actor.⁵³

Only three actors came to the United States from Italy in the 1927 fiscal year. The most successful was Tullio Carminati, a debonair leading man, and real life Count, who made several films before returning to Italy. Why were there so few Italians that went to Hollywood? The problems that kept Italian actors away were mainly language difficulties, a distrust of Hollywood's commercialism, and a reliance on the well-established Italian stage when times were tough.⁵⁴

Also affected by emigration were those stars featured in American productions filmed on-location in European locales, such as Lillian Gish. Corrado would have had a good conversation-starter with actress Gish after her role in *The White Sister* and later *Romola*, both filmed in Italy. After all, they had a few things in common: Gish had been discovered by D.W. Griffith, she visited Corrado's reported city of Florence for the filming of *Romola*, and had even learned some Italian. If namedropping was needed, Corrado had even worked with Lillian Gish's sister Dorothy in one of his earliest roles in

⁵³ Scott Breivold (ed.), *Howard Hawks Interviews*, Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2006), 76.

⁵⁴ Guilana Muscio, "Italy" section of "A Dictionary of European Actors in Hollywood," in Alastair Phillips and Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *Journeys of Desire: European Actors in Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2006), 311.

Gretchen the Greenhorn. Corrado was not cast in *The White Sister*, perhaps because Italian actors were certainly available in Italy. (Interestingly, when the film was remade ten years later, this time in sound starring Helen Hayes and Clark Gable, Corrado did get a small role as an Italian chauffeur.)

Corrado eventually networked with Gish when he played the role of Marcel in *La boheme*, alongside matinee idol John Gilbert. Gish starred in the film and the actress talked to Corrado about an upcoming Griffith production for which she believed the striving actor could land a role. Corrado wrote to Gish on August 2, 1927 and his ability to hustle for work may be a clue to his success. It would have been an impressive feat if Corrado could have worked as much as he did without a manager, the likelihood of which is possible since Corrado was not above begging for a role in the feature.

He began his letter with the flowery greeting “Dear and Lovely Miss Gish,” and that he learned “Mr. Griffith is casting or getting ready to cast his romantic Spanish picture.” He reminded the actress of her offer to put Corrado in touch with Griffith and conveyed the difficult circumstances he had in getting work: “Things have been awfully discouraging for me the last few months: no work and plenty of sickness in my family.” Corrado wished the actress good health and signed off “Gratefully and devotedly yours, Gino Corrado.”⁵⁵

The actress had Garrit Lloyd, Griffith’s personal representative, reply on D.W. Griffith Productions letterhead on August 5th:

⁵⁵ Correspondence from Gino Corrado to Lillian Gish. Undated. Appears to be a rough draft saved by Corrado. GCC.

Gino Carrado [*sic*]:

Miss Gish Writes:

Come over Monday afternoon.

Garrit Lloyd.⁵⁶

Apparently Corrado's Italian connections to the starlet enabled him to give a good pitch, but somehow did not succeed in winning him a role. The "romantic Spanish picture" to which he was referring was originally titled *A Romance of Old Spain*, but just prior to release was renamed *Drums of Love*.⁵⁷ It is not known what particular role Corrado tested for, though it was likely a leading or supporting role that he sought. Two possibilities included a Spanish duke, a role given to veteran Lionel Barrymore. The other part was a younger character, a count, a role Mexican-born Gilbert Roland was either offered, but refused, or lost, to the actor Don Alvarado, who was typed for the picture as a Latin lover. Though only mildly successful at the box office, *Drums of Love* managed to garner a comeback for Griffith's career (ailing since *Intolerance*). On the basis of Alvarado's performance, another director picked the new actor as a male lead—again playing royalty—for his picture opposite Lya de Putti, a Hungarian starlet of the German screen attempting success in Hollywood.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Correspondence from Garrit Lloyd on behalf of Lillian Gish sent to Carrado [*sic*] regarding upcoming feature. Undated, on official D.W. Griffith letterhead, signed by Lloyd. GCC.

⁵⁷ *Moving Picture World*, 16 July 1927, 184.

⁵⁸ *Motion Picture News*, 30 June 1928, 2214.

Though this seemed like a major setback, opportunity still abounded, as Corrado continued to receive opportunities, primarily as a supporting player of international roles. He appeared in two European romance dramas—a genre that had now become his specialty—for Fox Studios. One was *Paid to Love*, filmed in 1926, but held back a year for release, perhaps due to the abundance of yearly films starring Fox contract player George O’Brien. The other was *Fazil*, a picture about an Arabic prince in European society, filmed from June 5 through August 3, 1927—an unusually long shoot for a silent film—not released until June of the next year. Both films were directed by a young Howard Hawks who was not yet the renown American director, but one who had become influenced by the artistic European directors, primarily those from Germany such as Ernst Lubitsch and F.W. Murnau.⁵⁹

Corrado’s small parts in films at Fox—a tour guide, another, a prince—must have been well received and it is likely that he was awarded a bit part in *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* from this previous work at the studio. As in *Paid to Love*, where he is an eccentric tour guide, Corrado’s role in *Sunrise* is a fancy salon shop owner who pulls the two principal characters off the street and tours them around his expansive salon. Though short, it is a memorable segment in the movie. Less important for its box office receipts than for its critical acclaim and artistic value, the film helped Corrado to be noticed by

⁵⁹ Todd McCarthy, *Howard Fox: The Gray Fox of Hollywood* (NY: Grove Press, 1997), 73-75; for info on *Fazil* see 84-85.

directors and casting personnel. (In fact, even today, many movie buffs consider *Sunrise* to be the best silent film of all time.)⁶⁰

Sunrise was the first American film by Director Frederick Wilhelm Murnau who moved from Berlin to Hollywood after being courted by several American studios. Receiving less interference at Fox Studios than other recent arrivals from Germany, Murnau was given a free hand to choose the film's actors, with Janet Gaynor and George O'Brien being his own personal selection among the stable of Fox stars.⁶¹ As there were very few actors in the picture, with the story revolving around a love triangle of three principal characters, Murnau may have personally done the casting for the minor roles including Corrado's. As one of the more versatile international players, Corrado's contact information was likely found in *The Standard* casting directory, and in fact, Murnau's personally monogrammed and indexed copy from Fox Studios has Corrado's name underlined.⁶²

Sunrise premiered at Times Square Theatre in New York, paired with a Fox short that featured a new innovation in synchronized sound called Movietone. The short was titled *Mussolini Speaks* and featured the Vatican Choir, and the American Ambassador to Italy introducing Benito Mussolini, with the Duce giving a short speech

⁶⁰ Roger Ebert put *Sunrise* on his "Great Movie" list and gave it thumbs up and four stars. See www.Rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-sunrise-1928. "Among the best films of all time" says Donald W. McCaffrey and Christopher P. Jacobs, *Guide to the Silent Years of American Cinema* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 256. The film is also one of only a dozen silent films recommended by Leonard Maltin on his 100 Must-See Films of the 20th Century. See www.Filmsite.org

⁶¹"Sunrise," *Moving Picture World*, 1 October 1927, 312.

⁶² *The Standard* casting directories were donated by Fox Studios to the Margaret Herrick Library.

hailing America as Italy's ally, followed by shots of the Italian army and navy.

Mussolini delivered several lines in English, including: "I salute the Italians of America, who unite in a single love of our two nations." As an international celebrity, the leader drew the attention of the many New York theatergoers but was particularly popular with the large Italian immigrant community.

Upstaging *Sunrise*, the Mussolini film attracted many Italians who cared less for Murnau's artistic magic than for the chance to witness Il Duce's stirring message of international friendship. However, the pairing of the two movies for three weeks was likely a factor that led to declining box office receipts. Film historian Janet Bergstrom has theorized on the two divergent films that made up the night's entertainment, as "each part stands out as more concretely oriented toward an entirely different universe of thought and audience address."⁶³

William Fox said that he brought Murnau to Hollywood "not because I wanted him to make a freak picture, but because I believed he could contribute new ideas to the making of American productions."⁶⁴ The statement was alluding to Murnau as being remembered by the American public for his eerie *Nosferatu* horror film. Though parts of the exteriors in *Sunrise* were shot at Big Bear Lake, and Venice Beach in California, the film has a German expressionist feel due in part to writer Carl Mayer, an Austrian also signed to Fox, with whom Murnau collaborated. The European cinematic style of *Sunrise*

⁶³ Janet Bergstrom, "Murnau, Movietone, and Mussolini," *Film History: An International Journal* 17 2/3 (2005), 188.

⁶⁴ "Murnau's 'Sunrise' to Open in Month," *Motion Picture World*, 6 August 1927, 402.

owed to a concerted effort in Hollywood to internationalize motion pictures, an effort begun a few years earlier. An impressed movie critic from *Moving Picture World* offered the following observation:

The treatment is particular in that the story seems to have no definite locale. The city stores have English signs on their fronts, but the architecture is not American, nor is it definitely characteristic of any other country. The costuming might be Breton-French, German or Swedish and even the names of the characters are not used in the subtitles. In a way this adds to its charm.⁶⁵

Adding to that, the magazine assured readers that critics abroad would be forced to give *Sunrise* praise though the movie was made in America. At its Berlin debut on January 14, 1928, critics hailed the film as a major achievement for the director. *Kinematograph* credited the movie's greatness to Murnau's art and less to Hollywood; *Der Film Spiegel* described "remarkable continuity, richness of contrast in landscape, human life and desires which only a Murnau can picture for us," with the best compliment coming from the *Neue Berliner* who considered the picture "the most artistic film in the world."⁶⁶ The film helped propel Janet Gaynor to stardom and won her Best Actress for the body of her work of that year in the first annual Academy Awards.

However, there was some debate on the issue of bringing in foreign directors. Back in 1923, W. Stephen Bush summed up the logic of what he perceived to be arrogant German filmmakers trying to tap into the American market: "If the American with a naïve film manages to thaw the crowd, why cannot we do much better with our highly

⁶⁵ "Sunrise," *Moving Picture World*, 1 October 1927, 312.

⁶⁶ *Motion Picture News*, 14 January 1928, 158.

complicated and sophisticated and tremendously realistic films?”⁶⁷ But the marketing of the *Sunrise* story, as predicted by the movie trade magazines, was problematic for exhibitors, and the film was not a major box office sensation. *Sunrise* was, however, noticed by filmmakers in Hollywood, and critics all over the world, bolstering Corrado’s international resume.

Hollywood was the international film capital. With all the stars in Latin America that attempted to voyage to America, one editor of an amusements magazine in Chile declared Hollywood to be the capital of the world. “Since the days of Damascus, Babylon, Rome, and other ancient centers of new international thought and ideas, we have had different cities aspire to to that universal title...” but the editor added, “We have never seen a community with more right to this title than Hollywood.”⁶⁸

Corrado attempted to become a minor star on the world stage when he appeared in Hollywood’s supreme Latin American effort of the 1928 season—*Una Nueva y Gloriosa Nacion*, (known as *Charge of the Gauchos* in its later U.S. release). American motion picture companies had filmed a few movies in Argentina since 1915, but *Una Nueva y Gloriosa Nacion* was the first attempt by an Argentinian producer at making a major motion picture in Hollywood. The story was a romanticization of the 1810 revolt in Latin America against Napoleon-occupied Spain. The subsequent victory carved out several South American nations from the former Spanish empire including Argentina,

⁶⁷ *Motion Picture News*, 13 November 1923, 561.

⁶⁸Fernando Purcell, *¡De película!: Hollywood y su impacto en Chile, 1910-1950* (Santiago de Chile: Taurus, 2012). Quote taken from *Para Todos*, 28 February 1928.

Uruguay, and Chile. Included in the cast was leading man Francis X. Bushman as General Manuel Belgrano, Paul Ellis (the sole Argentine), and the Italian actor Guido Trento—recently arrived in Hollywood. The films marked the beginning of Corrado’s short run of playing Spanish nobility types. In a previous film, *Without Mercy*, Corrado had actually played an Argentine villain—a role that studio publicists used to prove that Corrado had worked the entire gamut in ethnic characterizations.⁶⁹

Una Nueva y Gloriosa Nacion was produced by Julian de Ajuria, a Basque Spaniard who had made his fortune in Argentina (his adopted country), and Albert Kelley, the American director. In reviews, most Argentinean newspaper articles began by commending Ajuria for the insurmountable obstacles a producer from Argentina had to overcome to finish the project. Intellectuals such as the rector of the University of Buenos Aires, the Director of the Museo Historico Nacional (Argentina’s national museum), along with high ranking military leaders, all concurred that the picture was a great representation of Argentina’s glorious past.⁷⁰ One English-language newspaper that represented the many Welsh immigrants in Argentina reported that the film’s premiere was at the Teatro Cervantes, a Moorish theater that had been commissioned by two of Spain’s leading silent film actors. According to the paper’s reporter, it secured “a house

⁶⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, 7 June, 1925, E15. Corrado worked with Frances X. Bushman’s son (Francis X. Bushman Jr.) in an earlier feature film *Never Too Late*, shot on location in central California’s San Juan Capistrano Forest. Corrado may have established contacts with the elder Bushman through him. See *Los Angeles Times* 18 June, 1925, A9.

⁷⁰ Alberto Lopez Echevarrieta. *Julian de Ajuria: una vida de cine* (Biboa: Bilbao Bizkaia Kutxa, 1998), 57-59. Lt. Colonel Abel Miranda sent Ajuria a note saying “...el hermoso film, que en forma tan altamente patriótica y artística, evoca hechos gloriosos de nuestra emancipación,” 58.

crowded from floor to ceiling and the attendance of Ministers, Deputies, and other big wigs galore.”⁷¹ The film received wild enthusiasm upon its initial showing, and *Il Giornale D'Italia*, an Argentine Italian-language daily, commented that the film had potential to educate immigrants: “The advertisement of the next presentation of this grand film possesses the power to arouse an extraordinary interest in all the foreign residents of Buenos Aires.”⁷²

Corrado played the role of Mariano Moreno, one of the early historical leaders of Argentinean independence. Despite a large Italian-Argentine presence of almost 1.8 million Italians—or 18 percent of Argentina’s population compared to America’s 3.5 percent—and Buenos Aires having the world’s largest concentration of Italians outside of Italy second to New York, Corrado received no reference to his Italian birthplace.⁷³ This may have been because the press wanted to play down diverse ethnicities in a patriotic film about the nation’s pioneers.⁷⁴ What is more astonishing is that actor Guido Trento, who co-starred, received no mention. Before moving to America, Trento was a veteran of the Italian screen since 1914, and would have been known to many recent Italian arrivals.

⁷¹ Julian de Ajuria. *El cinematografo como espejo del mundo: arte, ciencias, teatro, cultura, lujo y belleza a traves del lente magico*. (Buenos Aires: G. Kraft, 1946), 678. The English daily was *The Standard*.

⁷² Ajuria, *Ibid.* 679-680. “L’annuncio della prossima prentazione di questo gran film ha gia avuto il potere di suscitare un interesse straordinario fra tutti gli stranieri residenti in Buenos Aires...”

⁷³ Samuel L. Bailly, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 47. See also Ronald C. Newton, “Ducini, Prominenti, Antifascisti: Italian Fascism and Italo-Argentine Collectivity, 1922-1945.” *The Americas*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (July 1994), 41.

⁷⁴ According to Newton’s above article, many Italo-Argentines, engouraged by the consular offices and developments in Italy, identified with and were loyal to the regime of Mussolini (page 51).

Trento appeared in the biblical picture *The Shepherd King* in 1923, an American production shot in Italy by director J. Gordon Edwards which was yet another film outdone by *The Ten Commandments* and *After Six Days*.

Una Nueva y Gloriosa Nacion, titled *Charge of the Gauchos* for the American market, was packaged by its studio, FBO (the predecessor to RKO) as an exotic historical epic. Promotion sent to exhibitors and the press touted the movie as being filmed in Argentina with the co-operation of the Argentine government and featuring real Gauchos—"the daredevil riders of the Pampas"—along with 2,500 pack animals. Publicity actually cited 500 "peons" to transport film equipment were used by the producers, "so that the producers might film with absolute authenticity" the key battle scene at Tucuman.⁷⁵ Though the film did well in Argentina, reviews in America were generally poor due to a significant edit that made the plot difficult to follow.

Corrado made seven more pictures in the last days of the silent era including *The Devil's Skipper*, *The House of Scandal*, *The Gun Runner*, and *The Cohens and the Kellys in Paris*. Corrado appeared in several Spanish California films, usually as a Spanish Don: one such was the character of Montalvo in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayers' *Tide of Empire* where he received his top pay so far, \$250 a week, according to contract dated May 3, 1928.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ "Massive Gaucho Film Now Showing at Gem," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 2 November 1928, 19.

⁷⁶ Contract for Gino Corrado to appear in MGM's *Tide of Empire* as the character Montalvo. Dated 3 May, 1928, signed by Corrado. Salary was \$250 a week. GCC.

Corrado's manager sent out publicity material to newspapers to support his films. "Gino Corrado Cooks his Favorite Dish" ran in multiple small-town papers to promote *House of Scandal*. The vignette molded the actor's image as an "Italian born," lover of food that enjoyed cooking his favorite Italian dinners for friends. The article reported that the actor's hobbies included collecting antiques, painting and clay modeling. Similar to other actors, most notably Douglas Fairbanks, Corrado likely attempted to mold his image to that of a movie star—a leading man—by revealing his sporting activities of horseback riding in the foothills, and hunting and fishing.⁷⁷

As a player of foreign types, Corrado had played several French roles and must have been ecstatic at the news that Douglas Fairbanks was back from Europe and returning to the screen for a sequel to the highly successful 1921 movie *The Three Musketeers*. Reassembling the original cast seven years after its debut presented a problem for the Fairbanks vehicle. Leon Bary, a French actor who had originally played Athos in *The Three Musketeers* and had returned to France was summonsed to Hollywood. George Siegmann—the same man whom Corrado had bypassed in 1916 in order to appear in *Intolerance*—played the musketeer character of Porthos in *The Three Musketeer*, but had died of pneumonia only a few months earlier. *Motion Picture News* reported on August 4, 1928 that casting was finalized in what was now simply titled *The Iron Mask* (the early working title had been *The Man in the Iron Mask*), with Douglas Fairbanks playing D'Artagnan and opposite him were Leon Bary, Stanley "Tiny"

⁷⁷ "Gino Corrado [SIC] Cooks his Favorite Dish" *Republic City News* [Republic, Kansas], 13 December 1928, 1.

Sandford, and Otto Matieson as the musketeers. Matieson, a native of Denmark and a player of similar foreign roles—French and Italian—as Corrado, would ultimately not play the musketeer Aramis for reasons unknown.⁷⁸ Possibilities include illness, inability to master the heavy sword play, a personality conflict, or another available actor—Corrado—was better suited for the part. In any case, on August 7, Corrado signed an agreement (following a verbal understanding) to play Aramis.⁷⁹ Anticipating another blockbuster on the horizon, the *Los Angeles Times* mentioned Fairbanks’ full quorum of musketeers completed with the signing of Corrado—an actor “who has been rising to film fame.”⁸⁰ Corrado was no longer typed in the month’s *The Standard* as a villain, and was now under the management of Harry Wurtzel, a top talent agent and the brother of Sol Wurtzel, the west coast head of Fox Studios.⁸¹

Realism and continuity for the sequel became vital for publicity at home, and more importantly it served to deflect criticism abroad, particularly in France, where *The Three Musketeers* had been scorned by critics for its poor costumes and sets. For costuming in *The Iron Mask*, no expense was spared when the 75-year-old Maurice Leloir, the original illustrator of the *Three Musketeers* novels that were penned by Dumas, was brought to Hollywood at a price of \$40,000. The sets were designed by artist

⁷⁸ “Cast of New Fairbanks Film Almost Completed,” *Motion Picture News*, 4 August 1928. 396.

⁷⁹ Contract from C.E. Erickson representing Douglas Fairbanks Studios for Gino Corrado to appear in *Iron Mask* as Aramis. Dated 7 August 1928. Salary was \$250 a week. GCC.

⁸⁰ “Stage Stars Sign for Talkie,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 August 1928, A8.

⁸¹ *The Standard*, August 1928.

Lawrence Irving, son of noted stage actor Sir Henry Irving, who came in from England.⁸² The production sported several antiques including a fifteenth century statuette which had once belonged to Cardinal Richelieu, and a bible printed in 1552 and illustrated with woodcuts by a famous German portraitist.⁸³

Douglas Fairbanks and wife Mary Pickford had become the ambassadors for Hollywood and often entertained international guests. When Prince George (later to become the Duke of Kent) visited Hollywood, Corrado met genuine British royalty on the set of *The Iron Mask*. At the invitation of Fairbanks, the flamboyant prince watched the filming of one scene, although unbeknownst to him the scenes had already been rehearsed and shot, so no film was rolling in the cameras. Actors—which likely included Corrado—engaged in a sword fight, and Fairbanks, who did most of his own stunts, made a dashing escape through a window. The broken glass shards were actually made of sugar, and to the amusement of Prince George, he was given a piece to sample.⁸⁴

The Iron Mask was technically classified as a sound film, as Fairbanks, perhaps Hollywood's greatest film star of the silent era, recorded a prologue for the picture so his fans could hear his voice. The reason for not adding sound (beyond a composed music score) throughout the movie, at least according to studio publicity, was that the “narrow confines of simple dialogue between characters have been found too binding,” thus

⁸² Ralph Hancock and Leticia Fairbanks, *Douglas Fairbanks, the Fourth Musketeer* (New York: Holt, 1953), 221.

⁸³ *The Iron Mask* 1929 film pressbook, 2. The statuette was of St. Atoine, and the bible's portraitist was Hans Holbein.

⁸⁴ Hancock and Fairbanks, , *Douglas Fairbanks, the Fourth Musketeer* 222.

affecting the tempo and pageantry.⁸⁵ In its premier at the Rivoli Theatre on Broadway, it had a strong debut, and with eight shows a day, had an extended run, despite rain and snow storms.⁸⁶ *The New York Times* reviewed the premier with glowing enthusiasm, and described the “outstanding performance” of Corrado.⁸⁷

At its debut at the Cathay Circle, the *Los Angeles Times* commented that Fairbanks was well supported, as he had personally selected the actors himself for their “trueness to type and character.” Fairbanks was complimented for his impersonation of the seventeenth-century hero, as well as the varied personalities of the three other musketeers.

⁸⁵ *Motion Picture News*, 13 October 1928, 1147.

⁸⁶ “Fairbanks’ ‘Iron Mask’ Breaks Rivoli Record With \$56,300,” *Motion Picture News*, 9 march 1929, 753.

⁸⁷ “The Screen” section by Mordaunt Hall, *New York Times* 22 Feb. 1929. Hall writes, “Besides the dexterous and magnetic portrayal of Mr. Fairbanks, there are outstanding performances by William Blakewell, who officiates as both Princes; Nigel de Brulier, as Cardinal Richelieu; Ulrich Haupt, as de Rohefort; and ...Gino Corrado, as D’Artagnan’s implacable comrades.”



Figure 6. *The Iron Mask* (1929). D'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers. "All for One and One for All." (Left to right) Stanley "Tiny" Sandford, Douglas Fairbanks, Leon Bary, and Gino Corrado.

The *Times* wrote about Corrado's part specifically: "To the role of the amorous, religious Aramis, Gino Corrado brings the fire and intensity of his Italian ancestry."⁸⁸

The picture played in Italy the same year, and *Kines* movie magazine in Rome observed different actors than that of the original musketeers and critiqued the motion picture as being Americanized, yet noted it still contained the enjoyment and daring of the first film.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ "Fairbanks Well Supported in Historical Dumas Drama." *Los Angeles Times* 17 March 1929., C21.

⁸⁹ *Kines* (Rome) 50/1929, in Vittorio Martinelli, *L'eterna invasion: Il cinema americano degli anni Venti e la critica italiana*. Gemona (Udine: La Cineteca del Friuli, 2002), 345.

Corrado was at the top of his craft, and throughout his career, he referred to the film as his greatest cinematic achievement. By now Corrado had appeared with some of Hollywood's biggest stars and in some of its most lavish productions. He had seen many of the film industry's developments: the emergence of Hollywood as the film capital of the world, the rise of the studio star system, opulent salaries, and the importation of Europe's big stars and directors, to name but a few.

Corrado had scored a major role in a highly anticipated picture with hard work and, undoubtedly, a big stroke of luck. He climbed up a few rungs of the ladder but could still be reminded of the fragility of his fortune when Maurice Leloir wrote from a Frenchman's perspective as he witnessed a multitude of both extras and struggling bit players (a few that had been minor stars) wandering around with their own costumes and hiding in the corners during the production of *The Iron Mask*. Sometimes, to get rid of them, they were offered a bit part, so they would "disappear to offer their services and carry their miseries to other studios."⁹⁰ With the new development on the horizon, Corrado—now thirty-six years old and still, after all these years, sporting an Italian accent—surely foresaw its implications: the silent film era was now over. The "talkies" were here to stay.

⁹⁰ John C. Tibbitts and James M. Welsh, *Douglas Fairbanks and the American Century* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 374-375. The quote was translated from Leloir's *Cinq mois à Hollywood avec Douglas Fairbanks* (Paris: J. Peeyronnet and Co., 1929).

CHAPTER SEVEN

VOICING ANXIETY:

THE ARRIVAL OF SOUND AND THE INTERNATIONAL FILM INDUSTRY

Every day tests were taken by crews of cameramen and sound recorders. The stages where these tests were made became a tribunal where the future lives of thousands of performers, from stars to bit players, were decided by the governing power of a mechanical process and the decision of the men in control of the studios. Long queues lined up for these tests, and as they were herded forward to face their destiny, fear was paramount, though here and there you could catch a cocky expression of confidence, one who had prior stage experience and harbored no doubt of passing the test.

—Frances Marion, writer for MGM.¹

With the arrival of sound, foreign actors found themselves especially vulnerable to a whole new criterion in film production. For his training and to attach himself to the stage tradition, Corrado did find one niche for which he was ideally suited: Italian-language plays. A printed program dating to 1929, when Corrado was at the very height of his career yet the sound era was beckoning, may indicate that he was considering moving behind the camera, working in Italian-language productions in America, or ultimately moving to Italy (or perhaps all three in incremental order). The stage comedy in two acts was called *Il maniaco per le donne* (Crazy for the Women) and featured an all-Italian cast. “Under the direction of Signor Gino Corrado,” the play was sponsored by

¹ Marion Frances, *Off with Their Heads: A Serio-Comic Tale of Hollywood* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 181.

the Club Eleanora Duse and held at the Catholic Woman's Club in Los Angeles. Named for Italy's greatest stage actress who had died in 1924, the Eleanora Duse Club had been co-opted and partly funded by the fascist government to promote the arts. Corrado's directorial efforts for the stage may have been at the suggestion of the motion picture directors themselves. In a later interview, Cecil B. DeMille advised anyone wanting to enter into the technical aspects of the film industry to look to the stage where both he and his brother William had made their debuts. "The theater is a good starting point for the would-be director," DeMille remarked "Here one may learn the fundamentals of acting, staging, use of properties, and settings, and the rhythm of playwriting."²

Numerous actors who were established in the silent era of film could not make the transition to sound, either due to their acting style, the sound of their voice, or their accents. Many fine actors found themselves out of work, and in this sense, Corrado, who still got acting roles in a cut-throat industry, made out fairly well. But in order to work, Corrado had to step down a few rungs of the ladder and settle for small bit parts. A review of the number of roles in films he played in the early days of the talkies were as follows: seven in 1930, seven in 1931, and five in 1932.

The Great Depression influenced the picture studios that were contractually obligated to deliver big salaries to their stars. Louis B. Mayer, who was the head of MGM—the biggest studio—sent out letters to his contracted players pleading that they take a voluntary salary reduction. The first line of his compelling form letter read: "I am

² "From Hollywood." *Vo-Mag* Pasadena Junior College Magazine. 6:2 (May 1938): 3

writing to place before you a situation with which you are no doubt already familiar—the tragic economic condition existing in our country, in fact, throughout the world—and the struggle the motion picture industry is having these dark days.”³ Corrado only appeared in four MGM pictures before the letter was written, one being the 1931 version of *Possessed* with Joan Crawford. His top salary of \$250 weekly was first made at MGM, but by the early Sound Era, Corrado was surely not on the list of MGM stock players and therefore was not subject to any proposals as he was not under contract. Players of his caliber however, assuming the one hundred to three hundred dollars a week salary range, were requested to take a salary reduction of 15 percent. Some actors refused any pay cuts, such as actress Colleen Moore who tactfully replied in a letter to Mayer dated August 11, 1932: “I think that you will agree with me that the arrangements between us were made in full contemplation of what could properly be paid in these times and not on the basis that has been considered proper prior to now.”⁴ Ironically, Moore, whom Corrado had watched start out in motion pictures, could now affect the finances of a major studio’s budget and somehow contribute to the studio’s attempt at financial survival.

Corrado’s agent by this time was the Brian Kent Agency in Hollywood. The agency specialized in representing foreign actors and “ethnic types,” mostly Mexicans such as Lupita Tovar, who starred in Hollywood’s Spanish version of *Dracula*, released

³ Letter dated 6 August 1932 from MGM Studio head to ‘list of stock players,’ MGM Legal Department Records, Folder 354, “Salary Reduction Correspondence.” Margaret Herrick Library.

⁴ Letter dated 11 August 1932 from Colleen Moore to MGM Studio. MGM Legal Department Records, Folder 354, “Salary Reduction Correspondence.” Margaret Herrick Library.

in 1931.⁵ An agreement was entered upon for the duration of one year which entitled the agency to 10 percent of the Corrado's theatrical and motion picture contracts. With only a few films to Corrado's yearly standings, the result may have meant a termination of the agreement. By 1933, Corrado, either for lack of funds or a desire to keep working, became firmly established by casting agents as a bit player; waiter roles (and headwaiter in particular), Italian or French, became his strongest suit. Since these roles were seemingly unnoticed by the audience, what may have been a hindrance (no screen credit) to many actors actually benefited Corrado by allowing him to soon play in so many pictures.

Corrado would still go on to play interesting Italian roles in several big budgeted films at the beginning of the sound era. One of these was the waiter at the Columbia Café in *Scarface* in 1932. His was is a speaking role that initiated the famous scene where the character Tony Camote played by Paul Muni, and Guino Rinaldi played by George Raft, were sprayed with gunfire from an intriguing new weapon (a tommy gun) by a rival gang led by Gaffney (Boris Karloff). Corrado set up the scene by announcing to "Mr. Camote" that he had a phone call, which unbeknownst to him was a trick by Gaffney. *Scarface* was the first masterpiece of the gangster genre, particularly in its depiction of mafia figures.⁶ The main characters in *Scarface* were based on Al Capone and his gang. In fact, the scene in which Corrado appears was an incident that actually

⁵ "Studio on the Rocks," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1931 (clipping from Margeret Herrick Files)

⁶ Peter Bondanella, *Hollywood Italians: Dagos, Palookas, Romeos, Wise Guys, and Sopranos* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 195.

occurred in Chicago—the graphic killing was reconstructed by director Howard Hawks from testimony revealed to him by one of Capone’s gang members. Hawks later recounted the realism of the special effects in an interview:

In those days, they didn’t use blank bullets for films, so the scene when we shot it was like the real thing, with even a little blood. Real machine-gun bullets smashed the real glass windows and tore up the tables and walls. One actor, the brother of Harold Lloyd, ignored a warning to keep off the set. He went around the back to get a better look and lost an eye from a ricocheting bullet.⁷

Scarface was screened for Capone who was pleased with the added boost in notoriety the film had given him, but regretful that his character was killed in the film’s ending. Capone never saw the movie in a theater—he was convicted for tax evasion in late 1931. The Chicago premiere was delayed as the filmmakers quickly inserted a jarring moral scene that denounced gangsters into the film to appease the censors and Italian-American groups. *Scarface* blemished the image of Italian-Americans, claimed Mussolini’s censors, who banned it outright in Italy.

In these early years of sound, studios experimented with filming multi-language versions of films in Hollywood for the foreign market. Several struggling character actors that spoke foreign languages saw an opportunity arise, such as Jacques Lory who had come from Paris in the late twenties as a correspondent for the French press probably to cover the French stars that had been lured to Hollywood. Soon after his arrival, Lory

⁷ Michael Munn, *Hollywood Connection: The True Story of Organized Crime in Hollywood* (London, UK: Robson, 1993), 89. Columnist Ben Hecht wrote the screenplay, but the restaurant scene was, according to screenwriter John Lee Mahin, told to Hawks by Puggy White. For more on the machine gun experts of Hollywood. See also “His Job is to Shoot at Stars (Movie Stars),” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 September 1931, D7.

decided to enter films as a bit player either to earn extra money or to get close to the stars, or maybe both, as magazines such as *Cinémonde*, a Parisian cinema weekly, offered to pay him for any insider articles or on-set candid photographs of French star Maurice Chevalier who had relocated to Hollywood when sound technology was developed.⁸

Robert Florey came to America from Paris in the early 1920s in similar fashion as Lory, as a correspondent for another French cinema magazine. After landing a few bit parts, Florey jumped into the studio costuming department and also worked as an uncredited production assistant on *Le bohème* which featured Corrado in a supporting role. After struggles finding acting parts, Florey eventually moved into the director's chair with several short low-budget experimental films including one called *The Life and Death of 9413, a Hollywood Extra*. The latter film chronicled the life of a bit-player actually, who after finding no roles at a casting agency (Florey plays the casting agent himself), goes to heaven where his number is finally removed.⁹

France, like America, was also experiencing a surge in movie worker immigration. Many new arrivals sought refuge in Paris when the Nazi government banned Jews from working in Germany's motion picture industry in 1933. The reception of these émigrés in France was mixed. Many believed the sagging French film industry

⁸ Letter from *Cinémonde* (Paris, France), dated 25 June 1929, sent to Jacques (Laumonier) Lory of Hollywood, CA. It reads in part: "Si vous travaillez avec Maurice Chevalier, ce sera pour vous une excellente occasion de nous envoyer des notes intéressantes, mais n'oubliez pas de les accompagner de photographies." Letter is in the author's possession

⁹ Lewis Jacobs, "Experimental Cinema in America, Part One: 1921-1941," in Eric L. Smoodin and Ann Martin (Eds.), *Hollywood Quarterly: Film Culture in Postwar America, 1945-1957* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002), 9.

One movie in which Corrado appears that symbolizes this swap is *La veuve joyeuse* (1934), the French language version of *The Merry Widow*, both with Maurice Chevalier playing the lead. Jacques Lory also appears in the film, playing a different part for each version: a goat herder and a newsboy; but perhaps more importantly, he received his chance to cover the star for the French press.¹²

While some actors found an opportunity in the internationalization of the industry, many did not. One such actor was Karl Dane, a Danish-born leading player. Dane was a major star in the final years of the silent era, but was now un-castable. After being turned down for bit roles and even extra work as he was either too recognizable, gangly, or tall, Dane tried several unsuccessful ventures including a vaudeville tour, a mining operation, and even learning the construction trade. After being hired as a waiter by a restaurant as an attraction for patrons but later fired, the former-star finally rented a large hotdog stand. Though out-of-work actors were a dime-a-dozen in Hollywood, Corrado and his brother may have marveled at this former star hawking frankfurters on the sidewalk outside the entrance to Fox Studio. Sadly, when his stand failed, the dejected Dane ended his life.¹³

¹² Lory wrote multiple articles for *Cinemonde* while living in Hollywood including covering the Hollywood reception of Sergei Eisenstein in an October 1930 issue of *Cinemonde* where he took offense at Eisenstein's derogatory remarks about European cinema. See Marie Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein: A Biography* (New York: A.A. Wyn, 1952), 169.

¹³ Laura Petersen Balogh. *Karl Dane: A Biography and Filmography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 144; 163. Author Balogh also theorizes that Dane may have been suffering from Syphilis. See also Arne Lunde, *Nordic Exposures: Scandinavian Identities in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 106.

For the training of both American and its foreign actors, the studios opened language schools. Jack Warner started the Vitaphone School of Language to train his actors. Louis B. Mayer budgeted six million dollars for multi-language versions and hired sixty directors and actors. MGM hired speech professors for voice tests that could later make or break a career. One of the latter professors included Mario Marfiotti who was a former voice teacher of opera tenor Enrico Caruso. As fans could hear their favorite star's voice, sometimes for the first time, great attention was paid to diagnosing inflections and accents. Eventually sound technology improved and actors with bad voices were cut. In a letter to a movie fan in Chicago who inquired about the annoying pitch of her favorite actor's voice, Marfiotti reported: "In regards to your letter, I regret to inform you that the Studio [MGM] has decided to leave it up to the individuals to take care of their voices and that I am, therefore, unable to do anything for you. As a matter of fact I am leaving the Studio and I am entering into private teaching by the First of June."¹⁴

Several American actors in Hollywood scrambled to learn foreign languages, mainly Spanish, but Italian was also utilized by the studios. When the head of the film division of the United States Department of Commerce publicly advised the film industry that if they wanted to maintain their supremacy in the international market they would have to film moves in five languages—Italian barely making the list after English, Spanish, French, and German—several studios immediately had stars tutored in these languages. The comic duo Laurel and Hardy claimed that independent studio boss Hal

¹⁴ Correspondence dated 8 May 1931 from Mario Marafioti, voice coach for MGM to Emma Sharples, Chicago, Illinois regarding actors' voices in talkies. GCC.

Roach wanted to be at the forefront of this new industry strategy and gave them only one day's notice before starting multi-lingual productions, which necessitated learning the lines in foreign languages phonetically or reading a cue card just out of view of the camera.¹⁵

Laurel and Hardy scored a huge hit with a test run of a Spanish-language short in Barcelona, and shortly after, MGM's vice-president who was in charge of foreign production, Arthur Loew, named the duo the first ambassadors of the new "tower of Babel" which Hollywood was quickly becoming. The studio hoped the comedic pair would open the door for other actors that spoke foreign languages to form language stock companies in Hollywood.¹⁶ Laurel and Hardy were luckier than some other actors as their fumbled Italian language versions beginning with the short *Night Owls (I ladroni)* were actually very popular in Italy. As an example of their cult following, the two comedians were made honorary president and secretary (Laurel was the latter) of the Italian Laurel and Hardy Club, which issued members a handsome passport-like book that rewarded the attendance of all five Italian-language Laurel and Hardy shorts, including *Fra Diavolo*, a comedic remake of the 1830 opera about an Italian bandit.¹⁷

¹⁵ Juan B. Heinink and Robert G. Dickson, *Cita en Hollywood: antologia de las peliculas norteamericanas habladas en espanol* (Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, 1990), 22; 29.

¹⁶ "Comedy Opens Export Market," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1930, A9.

¹⁷ Stan Laurel and Olivio Hardy's honorary Italian membership booklet for 1933/1934, along with an original script of *Fra Diavolo* was on display at the Hollywood Museum in the exhibit "100 Years of Hal Roach Studios: Laurel and Hardy, 'Our Gang,' and Harold Lloyd," (5 July through 31 August 2014).

Each of the five major studios at the dawn of the sound era (MGM, Paramount, Fox, United Artists, and Warner Brothers) had Italian-language versions of selected films. However, the biggest international market was Latin America and as a comparison, about a dozen independent Spanish movie companies formed in America to make films for the Spanish-speaking market both in the States and abroad. One such was the short-lived Hollywood Spanish Pictures Company, produced by the Spanish-born bandleader Xavier Cugat, which focused mainly on musical or drama films and often debuted at the luxurious Million Dollar Theater in downtown Los Angeles.¹⁸ The Mexican actor Ramon Navarro, who had been a silent matinee idol in Hollywood and had played the lead in *Ben Hur*, may have been temporarily pushed away from the acting profession by his stubborn accent and his increasingly fading looks, and he was attempting at writing and producing with the Radio Pictures sound film, *Sevilla de mis amores* in 1930.¹⁹

A character actor that often worked in Hollywood in acting roles analogous to those of Corrado was Frank Puglia, who became the head of the Italian department at Fox Studios, and later moved to MGM, where he played in Italian-language versions for another year-and-a-half until they were discontinued.²⁰

Surprisingly, Corrado, not just a native speaker of Italian, but a speaker of *Florentine* Italian—the official dialect of the united Italy—was not more active in Italian

¹⁸ Heinink and Dickson, *Cita en Hollywood*, 79-81.

¹⁹ Heinink and Dickson, *Cita en Hollywood*, 53.

²⁰ Frank Puglia two-page publicity biography from Universal Studios, 6 August 1943 for the *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. Margaret Herrick Library Biographical Files.

language versions in a way that other actors in Hollywood had been. Though Corrado's infrequent listings in *The Standard* of the early 1930s no longer included his photo or even his phone number, he was listed in the miscellaneous section in the back of the book as one of a dozen actors that were Italian-speaking.²¹ Though it is unknown if any jobs in Italian-language film versions were sent his way during this early sound period, Corrado did later act in several memorable English-language films such as in *Top Hat* (1935) where he played an Italian-speaking hotel manager in Venice, stealing his small scene in this box office smash hit.

Corrado missed an opportunity with multiple language versions. By the mid-thirties, the multi-language experiment was all but over in Hollywood, with only minimal box office success reached with Spanish language versions and with popular international characters such as Laurel and Hardy who were in the top ten box office draws both at home and abroad. One thing was certain, if there was any hope of working in popular Italian-language films, he would have to do it in Italy.²²

The motion picture industry in the United States had experienced rapid growth. Film (production and exhibition) moved from the ninth to the third biggest industry in America after the massive capital investments with the advent of the talkies.²³ However,

²¹ Unlike in the late 1920s, Corrado no longer was regularly listed in the *The Standard* casting directory, possibly because he gained weight and lacked confidence in his voice. For sporadic listings, see *The Standard*, January, June, and July (Miscellaneous section) in the 1931 issues.

²² Hal Roach...Ibid

²³ Joseph Schneck, "Millions in Celluloide: An Industrial Survey of Motion Pictures," *Los Angeles Times* 2 January 1930, D14.

in any given moment, about 75 percent of all actors were unemployed, and given Corrado's dwindling filmography during this era, he may have had difficulty reinventing himself or reestablishing his "type" to compete with younger players.

In an attempt to capitalize on the many out-of-work actors in Hollywood, author and movie screenwriter—and former socialist—Upton Sinclair, best known for his muckraking best-selling novel, *The Jungle*, had proposed his End Poverty in California (EPIC) program as gubernatorial candidate of California in the 1934 election. The EPIC program stipulated that a state-funded Central Authority for Production would contract empty or under-producing factories to increase production. When asked specifically by a reporter about the plight of unemployed actors, a sympathetic Sinclair answered, "Why should not the State of California rent one of the idle studios and let the unemployed actors make a few pictures of their own?"²⁴

Sinclair lost the election and the EPIC plan was never implemented. If it had, it theoretically would have benefitted workers such as Corrado. However, the actor probably believed the smear campaign emanating from the motion picture industry that was orchestrated by Louis B. Mayer, head of MGM and chairman of the California Republican Party, in collusion with several other studios. The campaign included fake newsreels using studio bit players, and was the first modern media campaign in American history, estimated to have cost between two and ten million dollars. Most studios coerced

²⁴ Upton Sinclair, *I, Candidate for Governor and How I Got Licked* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 167.

actors, like Corrado, to contribute a portion of their income (if they earned above \$100 per week) to support the Anti-Sinclair campaign.²⁵

Several executives threatened to move their studios to Florida should the former-socialist win the election. The Sunshine State was no stranger to industry leaders as Jacksonville had been an early movie center two decades earlier where several New York-based studios—such as Kalem, Fox, and Metro— shot in the winter. By the early 1930s, production had moved to Miami where D.W. Griffith filmed several pictures after *Intolerance* and tried to convince the local chamber of commerce to help finance the construction of modern studio facilities.²⁶ Anticipating Sinclair’s possible victory once he had spectacularly secured the Democratic Party’s nomination for governor, actor and producer Douglas Fairbanks went so far as to visit Miami to recruit personnel for a new studio, and the coverage of the event was likely noticed by actors in Hollywood.²⁷ The moguls promoted fear that the gubernatorial candidate’s plan was a threat to their industry—one of America’s largest—especially in terms of taxation which was an important consideration to stockholders and film workers alike with the recent massive investments laid out on sound equipment and new studio construction.²⁸

²⁵ “Actors Asked to Aid Anti-Sinclair Drive,” *New York Times*, 23 October 1934, 16.

²⁶ Shawn C. Bean, *The First Hollywood: Florida and the Golden Age of Silent Filmmaking* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), 132. A reproduction of this letter appears in Bean’s book. See also “Dangers to Southland if Films Move Shown,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 March 1935, A1: “Florida offers a fifteen tax moratorium and a \$10,000,000 construction investment to the motion picture industry to move there.”

²⁷ Bean, *The First Hollywood*, 142-143.

²⁸ “We Have a Plan,” Episode 4 of *The Great Depression* (1993), directed by Lyn Goldfarb).

Hollywood was the location of more than a hundred-and-fifty production houses and two dozen major and independent studios by the 1930s. Several, comedy houses such as Roach, Sennett, or Christie, and almost all the major studios, had in-house comedy producing units that produced shorts to fill out the programs for exhibitors. In the mid-1930s Corrado acted in several comedy shorts, including Three Stooges comedies at Columbia, the first of which was a bit part in *Hoi Polloi*. He would soon display his best work in this genre. Several short films showcased him and he began to list himself in the casting directories not as an Italian but as a character man and comedian.²⁹

Corrado surely took notice as Roach Studios began advertising a search for veteran crew to support a “top notch director, who for years has specialized in slapstick comedy.”³⁰ No doubt his working for Mack Sennett and Al Christie as a stock player in the early twenties paid off. Corrado tried to avoid being cast as a comedian in the mid-1920s when he was in search of bigger, more lucrative dramatic roles. One example of a need to distance himself from slapstick was found in an early studio publicity piece written by an agent for *The Iron Mask* (1929): “Corrado was no comedian, and eventually found his way to the attention of Cecil DeMille at the Lasky Studio.”³¹

²⁹ In the *Studio Directory Casting*, he is listed under “Character Men and Comedians,” April 1936, 68. The industry had grown since 1928 when the motion picture industry in Hollywood counted 19 studios and 134 production companies. “Facts about Hollywood” (Compiled by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce) November 1928. Pamphlet. In the author’s possession.

³⁰ Hal Roach Re-unites Laurel and Hardy in Feature Comedy,” *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studio News*, 15 April 1937, 2.

³¹ O’Malley, 3.

A few Italian comedians were popular in Hollywood, the biggest being superstar Jimmy Durante, and Henry Armetta. Like Durante, another Sicilian, Armetta used physical comedy and stereotypes, but also props including food—usually pasta. A Universal publicist reported that at a farewell dinner he hosted for a cast member, Armetta's principal dish was spaghetti, and "in addition to the usual table implements, Henry gave each a pair of scissors!" Often cast as a worried spaghetti-eating Italian (the actor, perhaps to demonstrate his acting ability, claimed he detested spaghetti in real life), it was probably this same bit that offended Italian censors and prompted one American cinematographer to warn others in a trade magazine:

Just as in this country you will find thousands of imitation Shirley Temples, abroad you'll find hundreds of thousands of serious men and women imitating the things they see in American movies. Inevitably, this makes the foreign official intensely conscious of the propaganda value of movies. So they often read into our pictures things we've never thought of. For instance, suppose in one of our pictures we show an Italian eating spaghetti in an amusing way. Our producer uses the scene just because it is amusing. But the Italian, so much more conscious of film-propaganda, reads into the scene a subtle insult to his nation.³²

At the same time Italy attempted to build a national film culture. Corrado would have read about developments regarding protectionist measures, which included restrictions on non-Italians from the Italian film industry. But how, as an Italian citizen, did this affect his career? What would Corrado have thought about opportunities for other foreign players in Hollywood? Did other nations' conversion to sound technology make any opportunities for foreign actors?

³² "Aid of Foreign Officials Vital in Recording of Screen Stories," *American Cinematographer*, July 1937, 274. See also "Worry Pays Him," *Look*, 20 December 1938 and Universal Studios publicity piece written by Macc Lachmann in publicity files folder for Armetta at Margaret Herrick Motion Picture Library.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TALKING PICTURE DEVELOPMENT:

THE FILM CITIES OF MOSCOW, ROME, AND HOLLYWOOD.

“Our motion picture stars are better known in foreign countries than our greatest industrialists.” W.S. Rosecrans, President of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.¹

In Italy, Benito Mussolini’s plan began not long after taking power and realizing Italian cinema was in crisis. In 1923, American pictures dominated Italy with forty percent of films shown—compared to less than thirty percent of those made in Italy. By 1927, the Italian film commission was studying the technical aspects of motion pictures in other countries, such as that of Universum Film AG (better known as UFA) in Germany, and practicing international cooperation with other European studios. By 1929 Mussolini sent out a decree calling for all Italian actors and technical people—many of who were abroad—to return to Italy to bolster the ailing film industry. Many in fact returned, and though most were in France, Germany, or England, a few who worked in America actually heeded the call to return and help with Mussolini’s vision of an Italian film renaissance.²

¹ “Films Hailed as Trade Aid,” *Los Angeles Times* 7 May 1938, 6.

² “Mussolini Wants Italy to Advance with Production,” *Motion Picture News*, 2 March 1929, 616. Gallone, Righelli and Genina, Bonnard were two of the producers and directors that may have returned. A few of the actors were Maria Jacobini, Carmen Bon Marcella Albini, Farrari, and Livio Pavanelli.

The rebuilding of the Italian film industry was based on the study of three business models: the Soviet Union, Germany, and America. Italy's film industry leaders visited several international studios for the scrutinization of the mode of production in each respective host nation. In Germany, for example, Italians were given behind-the-scenes tours of the continent's largest studio, UFA. The Italian delegates visited the Soviet Union where they toured Mosfilm, Soviet Russia's biggest studio in Moscow.³

Comparable to that of Mussolini's modernization projects was Soviet Premier Josef Stalin's "command authority" of his Five Year Plan which began in 1928 and sought to superimpose industrialization throughout the nation. Soviet planners hoped to build, with the help of foreign technicians, large-scale technological projects such as huge Ford tractor factories. These factories, once efficient, would then be handed to the Soviets—what we call "technology transfer" today. By studying the ideas of auto manufacturer Henry Ford (arguably, the writings of the "architect of the assembly line" were the second most popular in Russia only after Lenin's) and implementing production methods of efficient capitalism, the Soviets sought to become a modern self-sufficient revolutionary nation whose workers could achieve a socialist future.⁴

³ Christopher Wagstaff, "Italian Cinema, Popular?" in Louis Bayman and Sergio Rigoletto (Eds.) *Popular Italian Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 43.

⁴ Thomas P. Hughes, *American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm, 1870-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 250-256. Lenin said in a statement in 1918, to not fear "bourgeois specialists." "Without the guidance of experts in various fields of knowledge, technology, and experience, the transition to socialism will be impossible, because socialism calls for a conscious mass advance to greater productivity of labor compared with capitalism and on the basis achieved by capitalism." See Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 64. For the scores of Americans that worked in the industrialization of Stalinist Russia in the 1930s, see John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in*

The transformation of the cultural revolution that accompanied the Five Year Plan was to give the arts, in particular cinema, a critical role.⁵ Social realism was the guiding doctrine of Russian film, and conversion to sound apparatus in theaters was slow (especially in the countryside), beginning in 1930 and ending about six years later.⁶ Much like Italy, the Soviet Union was taking steps to avoid a catastrophe with the coming of sound. The country was in need of raw film stock, sound apparatus, and sound technicians for a film industry where theaters served an annual attendance of 200 million tickets sold.⁷

The Soviet Union was experiencing problems with the film industry. Many of the avante garde films that were popular with foreign film critics were not as well-known in Russia, and as most peasants did not understand them the genre was nearly banned with several of its adherents, such as Eisenstein, not receiving film commissions and forced to teach the craft to a younger generation.⁸ Other problems were evident in movie

Russia's City of Steel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989) or Tim Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Penguin, 2008). For an explanation of how a studio head idolized Henry Ford "for his contributions to the common man," see Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 157.

⁵ Richard Taylor, "Ideology as Mass Entertainment: Boris Shumyatsky and Soviet Cinema in the 1930s," in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (eds.), *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Film: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 208.

⁶ Ian Christie, "Making Sense of Early Soviet Sound," in Taylor and Christie (eds.), *Inside the Film Factory*, 176-180.

⁷ Richard Taylor, "Ideology as Mass Entertainment: Boris Shumyatsky and Soviet Cinema in the 1930s," in Taylor and Christie (eds.), *Inside the Film Factory*, 197.

⁸ George Liber, *Alexander Dovzhenko, A Life in Soviet Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 131,137.

theater exhibition, including a lack of electrification in the countryside and slow conversion to sound. While America had nearly completed the wiring of 7,000 theaters for sound by the start of 1931, the Soviets counted a mere four.⁹ Cecil B. DeMille, upon returning from a tour of Europe which included Moscow, reported that theaters were packed to standing room only, but the industry needed technical know-how.¹⁰

With the coming anxiety of a new technological sound era, the Soviets, much like the Italians, sought to attract foreign film workers with valuable skills. When director Sergei Eisenstein visited Hollywood in 1930 to study sound, music, and color technology the local press welcomed him as a genius. Declaring a kinship between the two international industries, he claimed “this admiration is evident in the plants like those which Ford is operating in Russia with harmony between our workers.”¹¹

Italy also housed Ford factories which produced more tractors than any other of the maker’s factories in Europe, including the Soviet Union. However, Italy which was the more industrialized of the two countries, had an established automaker in Fiat whose factories in Turin were among the nation’s largest. To protect the company, Mussolini decreed in 1929 to foster “100 percent Italian manufacture” of automobiles to curtail the expansion of Ford. Thus the Ford Italia S.A. company floundered in Italy with just 300 of

⁹ Valérie Pozner, “To Catch Up and Overtake Hollywood: Early Talking Pictures in the Soviet Union,” in Lilya Kaganovsky and Masha Salazkina (eds.) *Sound, Speech, Music in Soviet and Post-Soviet Cinema* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2014), 71.

¹⁰ Director Back from Reds’ Homeland,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 December 1931, A1.

¹¹ Philip K. Scheuer, “Russian Film Genius Here,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 June 1930, B7.

the Model Y (the Model T version for Europe) sold in the five years of production.¹² And like Ford, Fiat had a presence in Russia, with over 200 of the company's engineers and technicians that taught automaking to the Soviets.¹³

Italy celebrated the Machine Age and made Fiat, Italy's largest automobile manufacturer, the center of the modernization story. Along with Italy's roadbuilding program that was akin to the ancient Rome, the Italian fascist government attempted to resurrect the ancient Roman theater of mass spectacle with inspiration coming from political rallies, the large sporting events of the era, and Soviet theater. The play at a large outdoor performance in Florence, titled *18BL*, told the story of the fascist revolution with the action centered around a truck (the first truck model, *18BL*, produced by Fiat) and its life during and after the fascist revolution. Though considered a flop in part because of its poor orchestration in using two thousand actors, air squadrons, fireworks, and cavalry at a large soccer stadium, the show was daring in scope.¹⁴

There was much inspiration from *18BL* coming from the Italian Futurists, in which one designer and winner of a grand theatrical prize at the Paris International Exposition of Decorative Arts (where the term "Art Deco" was invented by journalists) hoped that the theater of the future would have no actors (a useless interpretive element),

¹² Sam Roberts, *Ford Model Y: Henry's Car for Europe* (Dorchester, UK: Veloce Publishing, 2001), 167.

¹³ Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18BL and the Theater for the Masses* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 168.

¹⁴ Ibid, 170-174; Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 10.

and present instead a “dramatic arrangement of forces—architectural and scenic—in which time and space will be the dynamic elements” to function as a spiritual educator.¹⁵ The story for the *18BL* production had come from Alessandro Pavolini, himself a Futurist and a Florentine, who may have received inspiration for the idea of the story’s main character from the Soviet film *Battleship Potemkin* where a ship was used as the central character in a story about a mutiny of Russian sailors that sparked the Russian Revolution. Pavolini later became Minister of Popular Culture under Mussolini, a similar post but less controlling than Joseph Goebbels’ role in Germany.

Alessandro Blasetti, a dedicated fascist and Italy’s most prolific movie director, directed *18BL*. Blasetti had waged a battle, through his editorials in a film magazine that he edited, for a rebirth of Italian cinema—as throughout the early 1920s he claimed that Italian cinema was “dead.” Though *18BL* did not quite live up to Mussolini’s expectations, Il Duce congratulated the director for the play’s power of initiative and steadfastness.¹⁶

Similar to Italy, which experienced its apex in the era just before World War I, the Soviet Union celebrated international prestige throughout Europe and the Americas in the mid-1920s for its avante garde filmmakers. Eisenstien, the best-known, proclaimed his main film influence came from the “pre-1917 Italians.” He and directors Vsevolid Pudovkin and Alexander Dovzhenko were studied for their innovative Expressionist

¹⁵ “Actorless Theaters Forecast,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1926, 4.

¹⁶ Elaine Mancini, *Struggles of the Italian Film Industry During Fascism, 1930-1935* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 117-118.

montage cinema. Corrado Pavolini praised the three main successful international models of filmmaking in a fascist newspaper and singled out the Soviet Union's spontaneous relationship between the nation and film where they "merge into one." Similarly, Mussolini declared a film consciousness that benefitted the state to be the "most powerful weapon" and although the ex-socialist believed that Russian film was the foremost in this regard, "soon," he promised, "we will have the means for that too."¹⁷

The Soviet Union was engaged in a monumental plan of modernization its industry using an American plan. During the depths of the Depression, the Soviet Union, with manpower shortages and optimistic confidence, had invited skilled American workers to emigrate to its industrial cities. One was the medieval capital Nizhi Novogorod with a population of 200,000 which aimed to become the Detroit of Russia. By using the Motor City as its inspiration, Europe's largest auto plant was constructed creating an output of 150,000 thousand cars a year with the ultimate goal of an entirely Russian manufactured vehicle.¹⁸

The design and construction firm, the Austin Company, made Nizhi Novogorod the first model communist city and the construction of the plant and adjoining city for

¹⁷ Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 4-6. See also Piero Garafalo "Seeing Red: The Soviet Influence on Italian Cinema in the Thirties," in Jacqueline Reich and Piero Garofalo (eds.), *Re-Viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922-1943* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2002), 233. Nina Davinci Nichols and Jana O'Keefe Bazzoni, *Pirandello and Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 8.

¹⁸ "Detroit Hailed Soviet Pattern," *Los Angeles Times* 11 November 1930, 4.

workers was supervised by 21 of the company's engineers.¹⁹ The Austin Company had a contract for \$60,000,000 with the Soviet government for their services which featured the "Austin Method" of bundled design, //engineering, and construction services, and a guarantee of the estimate price being the final price, and high quality materials and workmanship.²⁰

Over 25 percent of the U.S. labor force was unemployed, and about 1,000 engineers and 2,500 workers actually made the trek to the Soviet Union by 1931. Earning considerably more than the locals, engineers received 5 to 10 thousand dollars annually a piece. American workmen, such as the 380 at the Stalingrad Tractor Factory, the largest American industrial colony in Russia, earned 200 to 300 monthly paid in dollars with an additional 300 to 400 rubles a month. (Housing, for example, was only 22 to 32 rubles a month.) Most Americans were sent as representatives of their American companies, others were contracted as individuals. Many of these workers came with no experience of a harsh winter, knowledge of the Russian language, or political affiliation. Many workers merely wanted to save money. And soon after their arrival, it was reported that the Soviet government was requesting 6,000 additional skilled workers.²¹

¹⁹ American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, *Economic Handbook of the Soviet Union* (1931), 97. H.R. Knickerbocker, *The Red Trade Menace: The Progress of the Soviet Five-Year Plan* (NY: Dodd & Mead and Co., 1934), 32-34.

²⁰ Michael R. Adamson, *A Better Way to Build: A History of the Pankow Companies* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2013), 10. See also "Samuel Austin, 85, Contractor, Dead," *New York Times* 24 May 1936, N8.

²¹ James G. Ryan, *Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 48-56; 98. So severe was the continued labor shortage of the USSR that the country

Several organizations in the United States promoted the Soviet Union's industrial policies. One was the Soviet American Securities Corporation that sold bonds as part of a ten million dollar capitalization scheme for the *second* Five Year Plan that began in 1932. Incorporated by an engineer that had worked in the Soviet Union, and a Chicago banker, the New York-based group purchased large advertisements in the communist *Daily Worker*.²² Another organization was the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce whose mission statement was to "promote trade activity between the United States and Russia," and was led by major corporations such as Edison, Chrysler, RCA, General Electric, Remington Rand, and Chase National Bank. In 1931, the Soviet Union was the leading foreign market for American-made industrial equipment and machinery. As industrialization was largely an electrification process, almost 6 percent of all U.S. exported electrical equipment went to the USSR in 1931 and the Italians sent 65 percent of all their electrical equipment exports to the Soviets in 1932.²³ So important was electrical technology that an American electrical engineer who worked in Russia and wanted to return home with his new Russian bride was offered exit visas by the Soviet

enacted pro-natal legislation that made homosexuality illegal in 1934 and abortions illegal by 1936. See also "Soviet Invites Craftworkers," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 November 1931, 12.

²² Elizabeth Dilling, *The Red Network: A "Who's Who" and Handbook of Radicalism for Patriots* (Kenilworth, Illinois: Self-Published, 1935), 227.

²³ *Handbook of the Soviet Union* (Published by the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, 1936), xiii; 327; 361-363.

secret police only if he would commit espionage by copying blueprints from Western Electric.²⁴

There was no shortage of electricity in America as the film industry demonstrated the ability to produce high current electrical power. One of the reasons that the moviemakers had moved to the west coast was because of power shortages on the east coast, a fact not forgotten when Hollywood celebrated its illumination with a yearly major parade called the Motion Picture Electrical Pageant.²⁵ A combined effort of the studios, the festival featured the major stars riding on lavishly decorated electrified floats, and flanked by glittering costumed beauties. The event drew crowds of hundreds of thousands that eventually convened in the Olympic Stadium, as the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum stadium was then called. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, while a candidate for the Democratic Presidential nomination, was the guest of honor in 1932. A ticket for the event cost \$2, and was held on Saturday, September 24 at 8pm at Olympic Stadium, the same 100,000 seat arena where competitive events were held for the summer Olympic games in Los Angeles just a few weeks earlier.²⁶ Modern film equipment worth millions of dollars was part of the parade procession, and the technical aspect of how a film is made was reenacted. The Motion Picture Electrical Pageant, the

²⁴ Donald Day, "Yank Engineer Steals His Wife from the Cheka," *Chicago Daily Tribune* 24 April 1932, 18.

²⁵ Gregory Paul Williams, *The Story of Hollywood: An Illustrated History* (B.L. Press, 2005), 93.

²⁶ Motion Picture Electrical Parade and Sports Pageant ticket stub, Saturday, 24 September 1932, in the author's possession. The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, as it is known today, has a capacity of several thousand less than the 1930s.

largest event of its kind, projected a mastery over the recent ability to harness the electrical current necessary for the making of pictures, and trumpeted the movie capital's international preeminence of motion picture-making technology.²⁷

Electrification became the top priority in the Soviet Union as industrial development was central to the doctrines of both fascism and communism. Vladimir Lenin, shortly after assuming leadership of the communist experiment, mounted a campaign of modernization that made electrical power in the vast Soviet empire an ambitious goal: "Communism is Soviet rule plus the electrification of the countryside."²⁸ Getting electricity to industrial districts was given priority in the first Five Year Plan and cinematographic infrastructure in the Soviet Union was tied to electrification.²⁹

If the Soviet film industry was to overtake the United States, it needed to train its youth for the making of films. However, few Soviets were enchanted by film glamour like they were in America. In contrast to Hollywood that was besieged with wannabe actors and aspiring filmmakers, an advertisement in Moscow's leading newspaper for a new film school that offered all tuition paid and a stipend package for three years for all qualified young students 16 -25 years-old, only garnered 350 applicants.³⁰ One individual

²⁷ "Film Pageant on Tonight," *Los Angeles Times* 24 September 1932, A1. "Pageant of Films Tonight," *Los Angeles Times* 4 June 1925, A10.

²⁸ Soviet Planning for Increases in Electric Power Production and Capacity," David E. Kromm, *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (Autumn, 1970), 281-291.

²⁹ Michael Rouland, Gulnara Abikeyeva, and Birgit Beumers, *Cinema in Central Asia Rewriting Cultural Histories* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 44-47.

³⁰ "Soviet Youth Fail to Scurry for Film Jobs," *Los Angeles Times* 17 September 1934, 3.

that did visit the new school—the Moscow State Film Institute—and saw merit was the president of Italy’s news film agency, L’Union Cinematografica Educativa (Istituto LUCE, or the “Light Institute”). He used the school as a blueprint for Italy to build a similar school in Rome, the Centro Sperimentale di Cinema, or the “Experimental Film Center,” which trained many of Italy’s leading directors in the Fascist era and beyond, and where Soviet films—banned for theatrical exhibition as policy of the fascist government—were screened for study in the classroom.³¹

The Moscow State Film School recruited film workers in America with the publication of an information booklet.³² The booklet was written by an American actor, and privately printed in Westwood Village—an area adjacent to the new University of California campus and near where Fox Studio had carved out its own “Movietone City.”³³ The writer related that he had been one of the thousands in the industry who was out of a job, perhaps like many actors and extras at the local studio, and had nothing to lose by traveling to Russia where work was guaranteed and there was a chance at becoming a director. He wrote, with some exaggeration, that the Soviet United Kino (Soyuzkino) studio was building a “magnificent new cinema city” outside of Moscow

³¹ Alessandro Sardi visited the Soviet Union and started Scuola Nazionale di Cinematografia in 1932 which became the Centro Sperimentale di Cinema in 1935. See Piero Garafalo, “Seeing Red: The Soviet Influence on Italian Cinema in the Thirties,” in Reich and Garofalo (eds.), *Re-Viewing Fascism*, 232-233.

³² Edwin V. Williams in *At School in Russia: Experiences of an American at the Moscow Institute of Cinema Research* (Los Angeles, CA: The U.S. Library Association, Inc., 1933) refers to the school name as that in the title of his booklet. I refer to it as the Moscow State Film School.

³³ “Fox shifts to Westwood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 December 1931, A1. See also “Fox Movietone City,” *Los Angeles Times* 24 October 1928, A4.

that when completed would be the finest and largest in Europe. The new plant would have “silent and sound film studios, laboratories and all modern accommodations, as well as film apparatus, a factory for the production of raw material.” And in utopian communist style that attempted to rival both lavish studio commissaries and spacious suburban homes connected with Tinseltown, it would contain “a garden city for the workers of the film industry.”³⁴

Another young American mailed a short film he made to the Moscow State Film School and was accepted as a student. He worked with Eisenstein, the Soviet Union’s best-known motion picture director who had fallen out of favor with the government and had since been relegated to teaching. The Soviet director had been recalled by Stalin from Hollywood where he studied sound techniques and shot a film titled ¡*Que viva México!* in Mexico with the main financial investment from Fox screenwriter and later gubernatorial candidate Upton Sinclair. The film was never finished but backgrounds and certain scenes were salvaged for *Thunder over Mexico*, and some scenes were rumored to have been sold by Sinclair to MGM for the making of *Viva Villa!*. Eisenstein assigned one scene of *Viva Villa!*, “the judgement of the dead,” to his students.³⁵ Had Corrado decided to go to Russia and attend that school with the hopes of becoming a director, he would have witnessed his own execution on screen (as a counter-

³⁴ Edwin V. Williams in *At School in Russia*, 16. See also www.quevivamexico.info/original.html for more information about the restoration proposal for ¡*Que Viva Mexico!*.

³⁵ Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 301.

revolutionary Mexican soldier) under the direction of Jack Conway and an uncredited Howard Hawks.

Corrado knew several of the Russians working in Hollywood. Many Russians had migrated to Southern California as part of the one to two million refugees that fled the country after the country's civil war. About 1,500 to 2,000 Russian émigrés lived in Hollywood by 1930, mainly lured by the film industry. Many had served in the White Russian army and were fiercely anti-communist and anti-Semitic, with several of those that were Russian nobility and ex-generals used as technical advisors or character actors on Russian genre films.³⁶ Corrado worked in a few of these films, such as *The Volga Boatmen*, where he played a Russian soldier. These pictures may have put him in conversation with Russia's popular actors, Leonid Kinskey and Mischa Auer, who were stock players in Hollywood Russian genre productions.³⁷ The latter two may have reported about the developments in the Russian cinema after the fall of the Czar, and were likely knowledgeable about Russian-language films viewable at assorted theaters such as the Filmarte Theater on Fountain and Vine.³⁸

³⁶ Olga Matich, "The White Emigration Goes Hollywood," *The Russian Review* No. 64, Vol. 2 (April 2005), 188; 190-195.

³⁷ Beth Holmgren, "Cossacks and Cowboys, Mad Russians: The Émigré Actor in Studio-Era Hollywood," *The Russian Review* No. 64, Vol. 2 (April 2005), 237.

³⁸ "Photography Highlight of Foreign Film," *Los Angeles Times* 19 January 1930, A7. The Filmarte opened in 1928 and was at 1228 Vine. The Grand International Theatre, the city movie theater on South Grand that routinely featured Russian films, occasionally with English subtitles, did not open until May of 1935. See "Swedish Musical Film Will Open Rebuilt Theater," *Los Angeles Times* 19 May 1935, A9.

Striking similarities emerged between the Italian and Soviet film industries. Much like in Italy, the Soviet government sought to raise Soviet cinema's artistic and technical level by using a centralized authority. The Soviet film industry's general director, Boris Shumyatsky guided the industry in the capacity of Italy's Luigi Freddi. He organized a series of annual film industry conferences and in the summer of 1935 he sent himself and a small delegation of Soviet industry leaders to film studios and manufacturing plants in Paris, London, Berlin, New York, Rochester, and in Hollywood where at the latter place they were welcomed by directors Frank Capra and Cecil B. DeMille, among others.³⁹

In an effort to borrow American technical help the Russian government hired an experienced man of Russian descent at Paramount to recruit movie people. His job was to line up an experienced cameraman, a sound technician, and a director or two, to go to Moscow to make a film using Russian actors. A committee from Moscow arrived in Hollywood to make the final arrangements for their voyage. Though the deal fell through, a similar model was followed by the Italian government.⁴⁰

One of the few places that Italians actually viewed Soviet films was the Venice Biennial. Although this Venice film festival was set up through the government's office

³⁹ Ian Christie writes in the preface to the paperback edition of *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939* (New York: Routledge, 2002) that in 1989 "...Maya Turovskaya organised a retrospective to explore the hitherto taboo comparison between Soviet, German, and Italian cinema in the 'era of totalitarianism.' Such concerns may not be fashionable in the current climate of 'post-ideological' economic and social reconstruction. Yet it would be ironic if, at the very moment when political constraint on freedom of research and publication has been relaxed, these and other neglected themes in the history of Soviet cinema should be buried within a rejection of the Soviet era *en bloc*."

⁴⁰ "Moviemania," *Van Nuys News*, 8 February 1934, 3. Bob Petroff was the Russian contact in Hollywood.

to showcase Italian films and engage international filmmakers, Soviet films routinely received prizes.⁴¹ In Germany, Goebbels arranged the First International Film Congress in Berlin in 1935 that attracted over 1,000 delegates from 24 countries. However, with the German Reich experiencing a shortage because of its many Jewish film workers going to France, America, or Britain, the vacuum was filled in large part by Italians.⁴²

In September 1935 tragedy struck when Cines, Italy's largest and most up-to-date studio, suffered a fire which burned most of the studio's facilities. The head of Italy's film industry at the time, Luigi Freddi, responded by assuring the company's president that from the smoking ruins a better and more modern studio would emerge. Only a mile-and-a-half away, ground was broken for a new 200 acre studio called Cinecittà that eventually became the largest in Europe. Cinecittà's president, Carlo Roncoroni, had acquired partners that included the father-in-law of Benito Mussolini's daughter, Edda to form an industrial group to help finance the new \$10,000,000 studio.⁴³

Roncoroni also travelled to Hollywood. He spent two weeks there studying studio construction and purchasing modern sound equipment from Electrical Research

⁴¹ Ennio Di Nolfo, "Imitations of Italian Neorealism in the Fascist Ventennio" in Jacqueline Reich and Piero Garofalo (eds.), *Re-Viewing Fascism*, 98. See also Mancini, *Struggles of the Italian Film Industry during Fascism*, 38-39.

⁴² Karen Fiss, *Grand Illusion: The Third Reich, the Paris Exposition, and the Cultural Seduction of France* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 142. See also Harry Waldman, *Nazi Films in America, 1933-1945* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 10. Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch (eds.), *Cinema and the Swastika: The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*. (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 10.

⁴³ Mancini, *Struggles of the Italian Film Industry During Fascism, 1930-1935*, 98. See also "Italy Film Chief is Here," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 August 1936, A2.

Products Inc., a subsidiary of Western Electric (the research and development department of behemoth American Telephone and Telegraph better known as AT&T), from which nearly all producers in Hollywood leased theirs. A huge press conference was held at the ritzy Café Trocadero on Sunset Boulevard, and Roncoroni, through an interpreter, acknowledged America's leadership in the field and made a business proposal to those film executives in attendance, such as financier A.H. Giannini, that they could make their films at the new Roman studio—in English if they so chose—and still retain their identity as American products “made in Italy,” with exemption from taxes and quota laws. There was likely excitement but apparently no immediate offers to accept Roncoroni's offer, except one from producer Walter Wanger. A few months earlier the American producer had visited Italy and conferred with Mussolini at his villa where together they viewed movies in what Wanger considered to be the best projection room in Rome outside of the Vatican and reported Il Duce to be a real film fan. Wanger said he was eager for a new background and would hope to shoot in color in the summer of the following year when several Hollywood studios temporarily shut down.⁴⁴

At Cinecittà, with the help of the state, workers were paid double time to complete the construction of the massive complex in record time (under 455 days).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ “Film Ruling Brings Upset,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 1934, A1. See also “In Rome Move: Mussolini Backs Films,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 July 1936, 11.

⁴⁵ H. Mario Raimondo-Souto, *Motion Picture Photography: A History, 1891-1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 173.

A direct Hollywood link connected with Cinecittà. In fact, Cinecittà (which means “Film City” in Italian) was attempting to be a self-sustained city on the perimeter of Rome, not without precedent in Joinville on the outskirts of Paris, or with the Fox’s new Movietone City, but more specifically, like Studio City near Hollywood where it likely received its name.⁴⁶

Studio City would have been the premiere example of American capitalism for Freddi, Rancoroni or any other visiting Italian film industry leaders to make a case study. The studio complex, along with a few others, such as Fox Movietone City (later Twentieth-Century Fox) and First National in Burbank were probably given consideration in planning Cinecittà. As motion pictures were Los Angeles’s biggest industry, the capitalization for Studio City demonstrated why the industry had grown to be the third most capitalized in the United States.⁴⁷ But who capitalized the studio complex and what exactly was this industrial model that Cinecittà and others might follow?

In 1920s America, Chicago was the industrial model most often followed by other American cities. The city had industrialized several decades earlier than Los Angeles and could count 370,000 industrial workers by 1924, more than that of Detroit.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Stephen Gundle, *Mussolini’s Dream Factory: Film Stardom in Fascist Italy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 19.

⁴⁷ Burton W. Peretti, *The Leading Man: Hollywood and the Presidential Image* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 58. This was an estimation by Joseph P. Kennedy.

⁴⁸ Of the 377,000 industrial workers in Chicago in 1924, 94,000 were unionized. See John H.M. Laslett, *Sunshine was Never Enough: Los Angeles Workers, 1880-2010* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 324. Robert Lewis writes “By 1930 U.S. Steel—the country’s largest steel corporation and

As the American city whose spectacular growth necessitated a plan for manufacturing to move to special districts or to the hinterland, Chicago's government directed its planners and civic groups in the advising of a comprehensive municipal plan co-authored by Daniel Burnham. The same director of the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, Burnham's Chicago plan was implemented in 1909 (when Corrado's family was still living in Chicago) and created wide, straight, beautiful, boulevards, crisscrossed by landmarks and monuments, that made travel and commerce more efficient and connected the city while encouraging further growth with the city's suburbs.⁴⁹

Los Angeles was not alone as other cities were also inspired by Chicago, even those outside the American Midwest region. For instance, the booming, industrial, multi-cultural railroad hub of Winnipeg—Canada's third largest city—billed itself “Chicago of the North” and the western prairie metropolis awarded commissions for designing buildings to several Chicago-based architects.⁵⁰ With the belief that the City of Angels's building boom and manufacturing base would help pluck the laurels from rival San

originally from Pittsburgh—made more steel ingots in its Chicago mills than those of its Pennsylvania competitor.” See Robert D. Lewis, *Chicago Made: Factory Networks in the Industrial Metropolis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 27-28.

⁴⁹ Carl W. Condit, *The Chicago School of Architecture: A History of Commerical and Public Building in the Chicago Area, 1875-1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 99. “Picture Chicago as Model City,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 January 1910, 3.

⁵⁰ For information on Winnipeg, see Robert M. Seiler and Tamara M. Seiler, *Reel Time: Movie Exhibitors and Movie Audiences in Priarie Canada, 1896 to 1986* (Edmonton, Alberta: Athabasco University Press, 2013), 45 and Alan F. J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), 283-284.

Francisco and give the city national preeminence, Los Angeles was sometimes mentioned by boosters and the local press as the “Chicago of the West.”⁵¹

In Los Angeles, real estate brokers, home-builders, bankers, and several Hollywood movie executives formed the Central Motion Picture District Incorporated, a syndicate that was inspired by a Chicago organization. The scheme sought to develop over 500 acres of farmland in the San Fernando Valley, an area whose boundaries were technically within Los Angeles and had only annexed itself to the city less than two decades prior. The Vice-President of the Central Motion Picture District syndicate was from Chicago, where years earlier, as President of the Chicago Association of Commerce, he helped the programming of the Chicago Central Manufacturing District, upon which he modeled Studio City’s plan.⁵² The Chicago Central Manufacturing District was America’s first planned industrial district, which according to the 1924 Chicago Directory listed 84 manufacturers, employed nearly 18,000 workers, stretched the urban frontier, and experienced continued growth.⁵³

Chicago’s planned industrial district was implemented when investors and industry leaders saw a need for inter-firm cooperation within a controlled area due to a rapid change in industrial technology. For Chicago in 1908 that meant access to a rail

⁵¹ Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 53; Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 2. See also “The Saunterer,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 1895, 21.

⁵² “Sennett Studio First in Valley: Film Development Near Van Nuys Under Way,” *The Van Nuys News* 21 June 1927, 4.

⁵³ Lewis, *Chicago Made*, 167, 178.

spur, storage space, fire sprinklers, and an electrical generator.⁵⁴ For Studio City, the technological advance was the introduction of sound in filmmaking and it was Electrical Research Products Incorporated that became a partner in the enterprise. The company had a warehouse in Chicago's Central Manufacturing District prior to a 1933 expansion and move to another industrial district. Western Electric's massive Hawthorne plant in Cicero, where the company manufactured the equipment, made the Chicago area the nation's manufacturing center for sound apparatus in the motion picture industry, with orders of fifteen million dollars in 1928 alone, and accounting for ten percent of the total business of the second largest company in the world by 1929.⁵⁵ The Central Motion Picture District organization attempted to court movie studios into a central district by building new studios—as the area's name implies—and extending infrastructure with sewer, electricity and telephone services. Part of the total 20 million dollars invested in Studio City also included modern upgrades in the studios for sound production.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Betsy Hunter Bradley, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 80.

⁵⁵ "Chicago lead in 'Talkie' Industry, Otterson says," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 December 1928, See also "Talkie Machine Big 'Side Line' at Hawthorne," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 February 1929, 21. In 1929 Electrical Research Company Inc., acquired a 60,000 foot warehouse at 3931 S. Winchester Avenue (Unit E) in the Central Manufacturing District. In 1933, the company moved to a new warehouse at Central and West 66th in the Clearing Industrial District. See "Clearing Makes its First 1933 Lease to Electrical Concern," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 February 1933, A8.

⁵⁶ James Lastra writes about the period from 1926 to 1934 when the industry underwent the "most extensive transformations in technology." He argues that sound engineers were central in the debate about new representational standards and theory (regarding realism and sound replication), and played a central role in transforming film aesthetics according to the studios' needs. See James Lastra, "Standards and Practices: Aesthetic Norm and Technological Innovation in the American Cinema," in Janet Staiger (ed.), *The Studio System* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 216-223. For more information on Studio City, see Debra Ann Pawlak, *Bringing Up Oscar: The Story of the Men and Women who Founded the Academy* (New York: Pegasus, 2011), 267.

Prior to building on the Studio City site, zoning laws had to be changed. In 1919, a majority of voters agreed to confine Los Angeles's future movie studios to the area south of Santa Monica Boulevard between Seward and La Brea in Hollywood. Apparently the legislation was forgotten until almost a decade later when a city clerk discovered that the Studio City development was technically illegal according to the details of the law. Land investors and real estate brokers fell into a state of panic for the hours preceding the repeal of the law by the mayor; thereafter the Valley was officially opened to moviemakers.⁵⁷

The Secretary of Labor under President Calvin Coolidge inspected the groundbreaking of the Studio City building site, and garnered the largest gathering of civic and film industry leaders in that area. He was quoted by the press as predicting that the concentration of motion picture plants would spur development in the rural San Fernando Valley, what was then the outskirts of Los Angeles. In what could be interpreted as a comment alluding to America's global lead in sound technology, he related a strategy of American business success that could be applied in Italy if Mussolini wanted to follow an American model: "The reason we are so far ahead of Europe in industry is that our manufacturers, as their business grows, discard outworn plants and build on new sites, with the latest technical improvements and efficient methods, creating

⁵⁷ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 100. Toberman proposed the legislation. See also *Van Nuys News*, 18 November 1927, 1.

new industrial centers, while European manufacturers simply add on to old and antiquated plants.”⁵⁸

The Mack Sennett studio was proclaimed to be the world’s most modern studio. Though not the biggest, the film factory was planned for two mammoth stages, executive offices, fire-proof film vaults, carpenter and machine shops, and dressing rooms—sixteen buildings in all. Certainly welcomed by employees, the new studio was designed with a swimming pool for employee use and for filming the Mack Sennett Girls. The wooden structures of the previous studio had given way to concrete and steel, with a separate building for the electrical generator.⁵⁹

The Austin Company, the same firm that later built the Soviet Union’s first modern industrial city at Nizhi Novogorod, built and designed Mack Sennett studio in Studio City. Based in Cleveland with several branches in other states including California, the Austin Company was arguably America’s premier construction firm for the factories of the modern age. The company, which promoted windowless factories for efficiency, had constructed thousands of plants in America and Europe which can be interpreted as an indicator of how streamlined and corporatized film production had become. Using the steel from Consolidated Steel Corporation, Los Angeles’s largest steel manufacturer, the Austin Company erected many of Southern California’s largest studio sound stages during the dawn of the sound era such as at MGM and Columbia. The firm also designed

⁵⁸ “Growth at Studio City Inspected,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 October 1927, E8.

⁵⁹ *Mack Sennett News*, Gavin C. Hawn, editor, Los Angeles, California. Undated (circa late 1927) publicity three-page newsletter.

and constructed RCA's Victor Talking Machine Company factory in Hollywood, as well as concrete machinery factories, paint factories, and plants for a host of other industries including aviation as with hangars and other buildings at United Airport in Burbank.⁶⁰

Movie studios and their need for open land was similar to another leading industry in Los Angeles: the aviation industry. Indeed, aviation was the largest employer in the city by 1940. Aircraft firms built factories on farmland near airfields, such as Lockheed in Burbank or Douglas in Santa Monica, and created a new model of planned suburbanization with industrial satellite cities. Aviation was connected to the American film industry as flying was promoted by those in Hollywood, such as Cecil B. DeMille and Howard Hughes who both operated airfields and invested in airplanes.⁶¹ Much of the San Fernando Valley was colonized via the air as real estate firms and civic agencies surveyed open lands and made aerial photos to map future properties or industrial districts.⁶² Since cheap open land was the prime commodity available in Los Angeles,

⁶⁰ "Victor Talking Doubling Plant," *Los Angeles Times* 3 March 1929, E7. "Samuel Austin, 85, Contractor, Dead," *New York Times* 24 May 1936, N8. "Sennett's Studio City," *Variety* 16 November 1927, 15. "Completion of paint Factory Anticipated Soon," *Los Angeles Times* 4 May 1930, D12. Erin K. Schonauer and Jamie C. Schonauer, *Early Burbank* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 65. The NBC Color TV studios in Burbank were also built by the Austin Company (page 52). For Consolidated Steel, see letter, dated 21 June 1935, sent by Alden C. Roach, Contracting Manager of Consolidated Steel Corporation, Ltd., Los Angeles, sent to Robert Fairbanks (Douglas Fairbanks's brother) of United Artists Studio Corporation (1041 N. Formosa) regarding the delivery of completed stages. In the author's possession.

⁶¹ Richard Hack, *Hughes: The Private Diaries, Memos and Letters: The Definitive Biography of the First American Billionaire* (Beverly Hills, CA: New Millenium Press, 2001) 68-69.127-128.

⁶²Peter J. Westwick, "Photoessay: An Album of Early Southern California Aviation" in Peter J. Westwick (ed.) *Blue Sky Metropolis: The Aerospace Century in Southern California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 24-28. Aviation (as well as nautical) was the inspiration for the streamline moderne aesthetic and this style, along with the simplistic brutalist architecture, became the de facto style of civic Italian fascist architecture most evident in cities that were built in the 1930s in African colonies such as Eritrea.

motion pictures and aviation, both highly profitable, were the twin industries that the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce focused on to attract industry, investment, and to develop regional cities.⁶³

Some of the infrastructure at studios such as Studio City was welcomed and encouraged by Los Angeles officials as it fit into the city's Major Traffic Street Plan. This plan encouraged decentralization and encouraged new business districts and clustered residences; and the San Fernando Valley, linked to the city by boulevards, was mentioned as a hopeful location.⁶⁴

The powerful Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce promoted the industry of the city to the rest of the nation. Public funds administered by Los Angeles County Supervisors supported the Chamber as the main vehicle for which to promote the city and county of Los Angeles.⁶⁵ Publicity, such as a pamphlet titled *The Motion Picture Industry*, stressed climate and "open shop" labor policies. The Chamber worked with the Los

⁶³ Wade Graham, "Blueprinting the Regional City: The Urban and Environmental Legacies of the Air Industry in Southern California," in Westwick (ed.) *Blue Sky Metropolis*, 247-251.

⁶⁴ Jeremiah B.C. Axelrod, *Inventing Utopia: Dreams and Visions of the Modern Metropolis in Jazz Age Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 109-110. See also Christopher C. Boone, "Zoning and Environmental Inequity in the Industrial East Side," in Deverell and Hise (eds.), *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 170-174; and Tom Gish, "Challenging the Myth of an Unplanned Los Angeles," in David Charles Sloane (ed.), *Planning Los Angeles* (Chicago: American Planning Association, 2012), 24-25. John Anson Ford, *Thirty Explosive Years in Los Angeles County* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library Press, 2010, second edition), 52.

⁶⁵ Ford, *Thirty Explosive Years in Los Angeles County*, 36.

Angeles Realty Board and the Automobile Club of Southern California, boasting that the metropolis had more cars per capita than any other city in the world.⁶⁶

The Los Angeles Chamber's special committees routinely consulted with the city's mayor and supported the new studio development projects.⁶⁷ The organization's president in the late 1920s, George L. Eastman, a builder and developer of Hollywood (not to be confused with George Eastman, filmstock inventor and Kodak founder), spoke at the opening ceremonies of the new film studio development projects, which besides Studio City, included the new Fox Movietone City in Westwood, where 50,000 people witnessed him, other dignitaries, and several Fox Studio players address what the completion of the \$10 million dollar facility meant in regards to industry and progress in America.⁶⁸

Universal Studios also celebrated major building projects. Though the studio did not move to a new location, and thus had no official groundbreaking ceremony, Carl Laemmle made use of the theatricality of the hauling of lumber and construction materials needed for new sound stages and large sets on Christmas Day, 1930. Over one

⁶⁶ Tom Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted: Boosterism and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce in *California History* Vol. 64; No. 1 (Winter 1985): 26-29. John E. Baur, "The Chamber of Commerce Cornerstones: Milestones in Los Angeles Progress, *Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly*, V. 38, No. 1 (March 1956): 69.

⁶⁷ Tom Sitton, *Los Angeles Transformed: Fletcher Brown's Urban Reform Revival, 1938-1953* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 20-21. See also William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 196-197.

⁶⁸ "New Fox Studio Thronged," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 October 1928, A1. For Eastman, see advertisement in *Holly Leaves* (a Hollywood booster newspaper) 27 October 1922, 32.

hundred large trucks laden with materials were paraded from downtown past the Chamber of Commerce office on Vermont Avenue and (passing bewildered actors which may have included Gino Corrado) onto Hollywood Boulevard and up Highland, over the hill to Universal. With a police escort leading what may have been the largest single-order of building materials ever witnessed, Universal let the world know that the studio was still a competitor that was well-financed with \$18 million for acquiring new story material for its 1931 season.⁶⁹

Motion picture executives and stars were included in some of the complicated planning process of the city that was sponsored by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. As film was becoming the largest industry in Los Angeles, familiar names like Laemmle, Giannini, DeMille, Goldwyn, Fairbanks, and Pickford sat on a citizens committee alongside the well-known major developers and lawyers such as Getty, Doheny, Eastman, O'Melveny, Toberman, and Van Nuys. The executive committee featured representatives from Los Angeles's regions and adjacent cities, with Sol Lesser, a producer, as the sole representative of Hollywood. Mary Pickford represented Beverly Hills, and claimed making Los Angeles a charming garden spot was important to attract tourism and promote the area via motion pictures to a worldwide audience. Pickford said the plan represented a commercial proposition that was "very much the same as making a picture." The citizens committee known as the Citizens' Committee on Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches was organized in 1927 at the request of the Los Angeles

⁶⁹ "Film Lumber Sets Record," *Los Angeles Times* 25 December 1930, A9."Universal Company to Spend &18,000,000 in 1931," *The Van Nuys News*, 26 December 1930, 8.

Chamber of Commerce. Although the costly \$100,000 report, later known as the Olmstead-Bartholomew Plan, was completed but not fully implemented, it showed that movie people had become part of the industrialist solution to city planning.⁷⁰

In the Soviet Union, Shumyatsky realized that any one of the big five American studios could easily outproduce the entire Soviet film industry and wrote a plan for a “Soviet Hollywood” based on the construction and layout of American studios. He called his film factory complex Kinograd, meaning “Cine-City,” in Russian. He believed that Soviet cinema merely needed the skills in America to come into its own, such as for instance, a producer (the Russian word “prodyusser” was borrowed from Hollywood and introduced by him) who could capitalize a production. After viewing several American studios in sunny southern California with picturesque mountains as backdrops and not far from the sea, he proposed an area that most approximated Hollywood’s climate and scenic locale: the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea in the extreme southwest of Russia. The plan also specifically approved of Cinecittà in Rome, but was deemed by the Soviet hierarchy as too expensive at 400 million rubles.⁷¹

When the Russian film industry went into a decline as only 46 pictures were made in 1936 and 24 in 1937, Shumyatsky, as the guiding hand of the entire film industry,

⁷⁰ Greg Hise and William Deverall, *Eden By Design: The 1930 Olmstead-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 34-36, 75-76.

⁷¹ Richard Taylor, “Boris Shumyatsky and Soviet Cinema in the 1930s,” in Taylor and Christie (eds.), *Inside the Film Factory*, 214-216. See also page 246, Taylor’s citation 102 cites Boris Shumyatsky, *Yuzhnyy baza sovetskoi kinematografi (Kinograd)* [The Southern Base for Soviet Cinema (Cine-City)] (Moscow: 1936), 18.

was personally blamed by Stalin and denounced as a Trotskyite traitor. He was imprisoned and executed as one of the million persons purged during the Great Terror. Along with the communist society not having any of the Hollywood trappings of success: the stars, big yachts, fast cars, high fashion, fancy houses, thoroughbred horses, nor the nightlife to show off any of the wealth (in fact, one of the fanciest restaurants in Moscow under the Czar was repurposed into the previously mentioned film school), the project was hindered and never attracted much foreign talent. With Stalin eventually assuming the role of patron of the arts and chief censor, Shumyatsky's plan of eclipsing American studios with Kinorograd, or Cine-City, was never completed.⁷²

Studio City never became the model industrial movie city as originally anticipated. Ambitious plans were gradually scaled back as a housing recession ensued and a 95 percent decline in residence building hit Los Angeles.⁷³ Although hardly a failure, Studio City endured the Depression despite a crashing housing market that particularly affected the San Fernando Valley when many high-interest, short-term mortgages that were taken out to fuel speculation slipped into foreclosure. Christie Studios, one of the production houses where Corrado had secured a contract decades earlier in the silent era, and one of the anchors of the Studio City plan, went into

⁷² Ibid. See also "Screen Pair Win Russia," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 June 1935, A2. Katerina Clark, E. A. Dobrenko, Andrei Artizov, and Oleg V. Naumov, *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 148, 281.

⁷³ James Thomas Keane, *Fritz B. Burns and the Development of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Center for the Study of Los Angeles, Loyola Marymount University: Historical Society of Southern California, 2001.), 52-53.

bankruptcy and was taken over by Electrical Research Products Incorporated when it could no longer pay the licensing fees to the company for the modern sound equipment.⁷⁴

More than likely, all these events caught the attention of actors, but as an Italian-speaker and Italian citizen, it would be the Italian film industry that garnered Gino Corrado's attention. Would moving to Italy finally help his career get to the next level?

⁷⁴ Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound 1926-1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 160.

CHAPTER NINE
WAITING ON ROME:
VITTORIO MUSSOLINI AND A NATIONAL CINEMA

Did Cinecittà surpass American studios? Several curious visitors from Hollywood included mogul Jack Warner, and actors William Powell and Tyrone Power who made it a point to visit Europe's newest studio in Rome on their European trips. Director Frank Capra claimed the studio was superior to that of his employer Columbia Studios.¹ Corrado was likely to have relished reading in the *Times* about Mussolini and his newly inaugurated "Italian Hollywood." Cinecittà's nine sound stages were installed with modern equipment—much of it imported from America—and on her visit Mary Pickford claimed Cinecittà matched any studio in Hollywood. The actress, known as America's sweetheart, was an ardent admirer of Benito Mussolini, and was photographed by the press giving the Roman salute upon her return at New York's port.²

Two American actresses were given contracts to appear in the first features shot at Cinecittà. Both were American-born of Italian ancestry and spoke fluent Italian: Maria Gambarelli, a famous dancer; and Francesca Braggiotti, who was the wife of John Lodge, himself an actor-turned-politician. Braggiotti also attended the opening ceremony of the Fascist-financed Cinecittà Studios in Rome—making her debut in the largest spectacle up

¹ Gundle, *Mussolini's Dream*, 23.

² "Duce Dedicates Film Project," *Los Angeles Times* 29 April 1937, 4.

to that date to be shot on its lot, *Scipione l'Africano*.³ Several other non-Italian actors—the key being their mastery of the Italian language—were also rushing to accept roles in Italy. One such actress was Bessie Love, a discovery of D.W. Griffith who appeared in both *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* but who was now recently divorced and living in England.⁴

Newspapers reported Vittorio Mussolini, Il Duce's youngest son, as a key player in the new studio and that he planned to personally recruit technical people in America for his new production company that was, according to official reports, based on an American model. The young Mussolini hoped to supply short films for Italy's market, as American studios were keen to exploit Italy's deficiency of shorts as early as 1929. Hollywood's Italian-speaking actors must have been excited at the possibility of going to Italy, or at least at the option of making a film there with their American studio. Although actor Henry Armetta had practically cornered the market on Italian characterizations in America according to one *Times* article, his stereotypical antics that upset the Italian government meant that Italy might have room for other Italian-speaking actors, especially one like Corrado who had still retained his Italian citizenship.⁵

A boost to Corrado's visibility to the Mussolini family was his role as Aramis, one of the Three Musketeers, alongside Douglas Fairbanks in a film that was popular in

³ "Film Players Rush to take Road to Rome," *Daily Capitol News* (Jefferson City, MO), 22 July 1937, 3.

⁴ Ibid. See also McCarthy, *Howard Hawks*, 128.

⁵ "Actors Often Profit from Misfortune," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 February 1937, C3.

Italy—*The Iron Mask*. It may not be a coincidence that Mussolini's private bodyguards, a military elite group, were named the Musketeers. The shoulder emblem on their uniform depicted a musketeer—clearly a seventeenth-century French royal guard—holding a large bullet and protecting the outline of the boot of Italy. Embroidered above the emblem was iconic “Uno per Tutti—Tutti per Uno.”⁶ Later in life, Il Duce's son admitted he and his siblings were big fans of the original *The Three Musketeers* film, as well as the book. “Then our tastes changed,” he claimed—less French with Dumas' writings and more nationalistic with popular Italian adventure writers. However, as a boy living in his father's home at the time when the future dictator was just forming the National Fascist Party, little Vittorio Mussolini and his siblings called themselves the Three Musketeers from the first Fairbanks film of the same name. Vittorio Mussolini wrote that his sister Edda, as the oldest, was the head of the group, so one can assume that she played the D'Artagnan character acted by Fairbanks. And it was probably in the capacity of a star-struck fan that Edda Mussolini personally met the ageing matinee idol in England in 1934 on the film set of the appropriately titled *The Last Days of Don Juan*.⁷

A few years earlier, in May of 1926, when Fairbanks was in Europe to oversee his investments in European theaters, Il Duce personally received the royal family of

⁶ “...the famous Blackshirt Musketeers were comprised of 300 of the most reliable of the fascist militiamen” according to the magazine *Ken*, 17 December 1938, 65. The only picture of the Musketeers insignia patch that I have seen was on Ebay where these rare patches sell for upwards of \$500.

⁷ Vittorio Mussolini, *Mussolini: The Tragic Women in His Life* (New York: The Dial Press, 1973), 68. For Edda with Fairbanks, the author has in his possession a photograph showing actors Merle Oberon, Douglas Fairbanks, Signor Gaudi (the Italian Ambassador), and Edda Mussolini on the set of *The Last Days of Don Juan*, in 1934.

Hollywood—Fairbanks and his wife, Mary Pickford. The largest Italian-language newspaper in America, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, reported the mutual admiration of both Mussolini and Fairbanks, and Fairbanks marveled at the modernity of the New Italy and complimented Il Duce, probably remembering *The Eternal City* and newsreels, commenting “I have seen you often in the movies, but like you better in real life.”⁸

Benito Mussolini was a big fan of cinema and theater. During the time of his stint as a professional journalist he wrote a fictional piece that was made into a play and shown beyond Italy’s borders, and later made into a feature film in Germany. Il Duce enjoyed pictures at his private movie theater at his villa outside Rome and frequently viewed American comedies. Though his favorite comic was Charlie Chaplin, he also liked Laurel and Hardy who, with the advent of sound, had become superstars in Italy with their multi-language versions produced at Hal Roach Studios. However, film was more than amusement as Mussolini considered it “an extraordinary means of spreading propaganda.” According to Mussolini’s son Romano, Il Duce was well-informed about Hollywood, as son Vittorio had detailed conversations with his father “about directors and actors and kept him abreast of all the important developments.” In regards to news about international co-productions, it is probable that any Italians with knowledge of the

⁸ “Mary and Doug Visit Mussolini,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 May 1926, 3. “Fairbanks to Improve Theaters,” *Los Angeles Times* 11 June 1926, 1. See also Giorgio Bertellini, Sovereign Consumption: Italian Americans’ Transnational Film Culture in 1920s New York City,” in Simone Cinotto (ed.), *Making Italian America: Consumer Culture and the production of Ethnic Identities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 95-96.

inner-workings of the American film industry would have been consulted in these reports.⁹

The issue of dubbing became very important in the debate about creating a national cinema. Several regulations were passed in Italy that insisted on its own actors dubbing versions of American films in place of Hollywood stars for the Italian screens. Italy was attempting to court Paramount studios to set up a production facility inside its borders, as it had done in France, partly for this purpose. Tied to nationalism, language became vital in Italy and regional dialects were eliminated onscreen with Florentine pronunciation used as the standard Italian that was the regulated norm.¹⁰

Mandates for a national language usually arise when there is a state of emergency in a nation, i.e. the perception (sometimes very real) of an external or internal threat that may unravel national unity. Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco would rise to leadership positions with a key cause being the importance of linguistic unity. Mussolini, in particular, being a former school teacher, soldier, and journalist, believed that language was crucial to the cultural and political unification of Italy. Modern Italy was hardly more than eighty years old and struggling with a myriad of dialects and a standardized Italian when the law required all dubbing to be done in Rome by professionals.¹¹

⁹ Romano Mussolini, *My Father Il Duce: A Memoir of Mussolini's Son* (San Diego, CA: Kales Press, 2006), 90.

¹⁰ Jaqueline Reich, "Mussolini at the Movies: Fascism, Film, and Culture," in Reich and Garofolo (eds.) *Re-viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922-1943*, 11.

¹¹ "Nations Crave Share of American Money", *The Los Angeles Times*, 31 May 1936, C1.

Due to multi-language versions, and later a preference for dubbing, co-productions, and competition amongst the majors to secure a world market, many international collaboration attempts affected Italian production. This included Walt Disney who visited Mussolini (for the purpose of promoting *Snow White*). Banker and head of United Artists, A.P. Giannini, announced that the company would be swapping talent in Britain (in order to get around quota restrictions) and was engaged in expanding United Artists, also met with Mussolini's representative. James Roosevelt, the president's son who worked at MGM, also paid an informal visit to Il Duce on behalf of his father.

In a parallel with marketing strategies of the other American majors, MGM expanded its global facilities in 1937, from reportedly building theaters in far-off locations such as Calcutta, to extending operations in England where Louis B. Mayer personally supervised a segment of the filming of *A Yank at Oxford* and later signed the beautiful actresses Hedy Lamarr and Greer Garson.¹² Already having a distribution office in Rome, MGM went into a market where two-thirds of Italy's screens were wired for sound. More urgently, after July 1, 1937, exhibitors in Italy would be mandated to show one Italian picture for every foreign picture shown.¹³

¹² Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 118-119. See also "MGM Starts London Production in August," *The Film Daily*, 26 June 1937, 3; and Bosley Crowther, *The Lion's Share: The Story of an Entertainment Empire* (New York: Dutton, 1957), 246.

¹³ David Welky, *The Moguls and the Dictators: Hollywood and the Coming of World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 48; "No Change in Terms of Import Agreement is Anticipated," *The Film Daily*, 7 June 1937, 1. "U.S. Distributors Battling Italian Dubbing Fee Jump," *The Film Daily*, 29 May 1937, 4.

In June, Renato Senise, an attorney from Italy living in America, represented Hal Roach when he made a proposal of a joint effort of an Italian-American film venture. The proposal was shown to Il Duce himself, the Chief of Censorship, and to the man who was in charge of Italian motion picture production at the time, Luigi Freddi. Despite the latter's initial apprehension, Roach and Senise received a meeting, but the event called for urgency which was confidentially indicated in an official letter: "It is advisable that you sail on the first possible steamer, as other proposals of the kind have already reached our Government."¹⁴

The most competitive rival proposal was from producer Walter Wanger, best known later for *Algiers* (1938) and *Stagecoach* (1939). He had promoted a joint venture of American and Italian productions to take advantage of Mussolini's well-funded national cinema program for Italy. Wanger promoted the idea as early as 1936 and hoped to "pry loose distribution income that was currently blocked by the Italian government—producers could use their funds for English-language films shot in Italy, while American stars could collect their salaries tax-free."¹⁵ Unfortunately, studio head Hal Roach had plans of his own. A *Los Angeles Times* article dated August 5, 1937, delighted in a rivalry brewing between the two that escalated when Roach beat Wanger to Italy by a few days: "Walter Wanger leaves for New York Sunday to attempt to carry out his long cherished

¹⁴ Confidential letter to Renato Senise from (Italian State Department?), dated 12 June 1937. Box 21:8 "Senise Vs. Roach folder. Hollywood Museum Collection (Hal Roach Material), University of Southern California Cinema Library.

¹⁵ Matthew Bernstein, *Walter Wanger, Hollywood Independent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 127.

ambition to collaborate with Mussolini, as part of a trip abroad. But Hal Roach is even more to the fore, since he flew East last night to embark for the Latin country where he will confer with Il Duce on picture making possibilities.”¹⁶

On September, 23 1937 Vittorio Mussolini, the eldest son of Benito Mussolini, became the first of his family to visit the American nation, home to a sizeable portion of the 45 million Italians Il Duce counted in his greater empire. The dictator’s son was bank-rolled with \$6,000,000 from the Italian government to form a company called R.A.M. Films, named for its founders Roach and Mussolini. The company’s initial scheduled projects were four operettas to be made in a year, the first being a Laurel and Hardy parody on “Rigoletto,” all to be distributed by MGM. The younger Mussolini traveled from Rome to Naples where he and Roach set sail on the ocean liner *Rex* to New York City with the final destination being California. The goal was to study Hollywood film production and to hire technical crews in America. One of the key elements in the R.A.M. deal was that actors in Italy would be used for all productions.¹⁷

Aboard the *Rex* traveling with Roach and Mussolini was Charles Clyde Pettijohn, a lawyer and counsel to the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) and Film Boards of Trade. Two decades earlier, Pettijohn had been film producer Louis Selznick’s attorney, and his wife had been an actress. Pettijohn predicted that the film industry would grow to collectively need counsel to handle trade

¹⁶ Edwin Schallert, “Producers to Vie for Chance in Picture-Making with Mussolini,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 August 1937, 15.

¹⁷ “Il Duce’s Son to Visit U.S. on Film Mission.” *New York Times*, 16 September 1937, 29.

relations with exhibitors and legislative affairs, particularly the issues of censorship and taxation. After several Hollywood scandals, including that of the widely publicized trials of comedian Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle in 1921, Pettijohn, a serious baseball fan, drew inspiration from the baseball “czar” or commissioner which was created after the infamous Chicago Black Sox Scandal. He formed his MPDDA organization and hired his friend from Indiana, William Hays, a Republican Party national chairman and former Postmaster General of the United States, as the first president in 1922. The organization fought against municipal censorship boards on behalf of the media moguls.¹⁸ Pettijohn had tried to pacify the Catholic Church’s opposition to films it deemed immoral by helping to write the self-regulatory Production Code of 1930. More significantly, Pettijohn had already experienced a satisfactory working relationship with the Italian government when on behalf of several American studios he had travelled to Rome in 1927, met with Benito Mussolini, and successfully orchestrated the release of the impounded lira of several American film companies.¹⁹ Thus the organization functioned as the motion picture industry’s de facto Chamber of Commerce which sought to stimulate trade between the two nations.

¹⁸ “Hal Roach Announces Big Deal as Mussolini Partner,” *Motion Picture Herald* 129 (2 October 1937), 21. In Doherty’s version, Charles C. Pettijohn bumped into Roach by chance. See Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939*, 127.

¹⁹ Charles C. Pettijohn Jr., *Diary of a Rich Man’s Kid: Old Hollywood, World Leaders, Movers and Shakers, and One Boy at the Center of it All!* (New York: Beaufort, 2014), 47-49. See also Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., 1922-1939 papers in an online archive which has a concise biography for Pettijohn. MPPDA Digital Archive (Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia) at www.mppda.flinders.edu.au

When the *Rex* arrived in New York, a special Coast Guard cutter requested by the State Department, along with four patrol boats, led her into port. Fifty police officers were on duty to control several hundred protesters, mainly from the Communist party.²⁰ With the protesters carefully kept out of view, the young Mussolini was bewildered and thought the police were placed around him to keep him from doing anything illegal instead of to protect him.²¹

Mussolini was taken to the Pettijohn home in Long Island where he stayed several nights. Pettijohn also took the young Mussolini to a public park, much to the excitement of the local Italian children. Pettijohn had built and donated the park (named Pettijohn Park) to the city of Harrison, and there for the first time the young Mussolini witnessed a game of baseball, the American pastime. Perhaps Pettijohn wanted Mussolini to rethink his plan of only using primarily Italian actors when for dinner, he invited Virginia Judd, a stunning young blond model originally from Indianapolis, who one newspaper said typified American beauty and was as “wholesome as she was pretty.”²² Staying in New York, Pettijohn personally organized the next phase of Mussolini’s Hollywood visit—after consulting with the State Department as Mussolini was the son of a world leader—by adding an itinerary of several studio tours, including Warner Brothers and MGM.²³

²⁰ “Il Duce’s Son Here, ‘Spirited Ashore’,” *New York Times*, 9 September 1937, 1.

²¹ “Duce’s Son Seeks to Stem Tide Of Italian ‘Flops’,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 September 1937, 2.

²² “Beauties of 1937,” *Ottawa Citizen* (Ottawa, Ontario, Canada), 12 October 1937, 22.

²³ Pettijohn Jr., *Diary of a Rich Man’s Kid*, 10; 46.

Overlapping Vittorio Mussolini's visit to America, Il Duce was for the first time visiting Munich (September 25-29) at the invitation of Hitler, further cementing an alliance between the two nations. *Motion Picture Herald* made mention that Hitler's first social function for Il Duce was a tea party that included Germany's film and stage stars organized by Leni Riefenstahl, director of the Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* (1935). The magazine article concluded with a blow to "any Italian motion picture venture" (the recent Roach-Mussolini collaboration) by labeling it as propagandistic cooperation, and reminded the readers of Nazi Germany's previous attempts to counter Hollywood's "liberal influences" by ratifying a film alliance with Japan.²⁴

At 6:40AM on a Saturday morning, September 26, a TWA airplane landed in Burbank's Union Air Terminal (arriving almost 30 minutes ahead of schedule) with Benito Mussolini's oldest son for his visit to Hollywood, chaperoned by Hal Roach. Despite the early arrival, several hundred people made up mostly of civic leaders, a few film actors, Italian consulate employees, and autograph hunters were on hand to receive him. A small squad of men clad in fascist blackshirts was also in attendance. Though Vittorio was protected by a ring of uniformed policemen, one admiring *paesano* managed to greet him. The representative of the Italian American community that newspapers reported as hugging Mussolini as he stepped off the plane was none other than Luigi Liserani, Gino Corrado's younger brother, who was vice-commander of the Dante

²⁴ "Hal Roach Announces Big Deal as Mussolini Partner," *Motion Picture Herald*, 2 October 1937, 21-22.

Alighieri Society. Liserani told Mussolini in Italian: “My dear friend! This is absolutely the finest surprise to see you in this country so far from our homeland.”²⁵

The Italian theater critic Corrado Pavolini was also part of Mussolini’s entourage, having sailed with him from Italy. Although hardly mentioned by the press, and he gave no interviews, the futurist and fascist, whose brother was instrumental in the formation of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinema met the fellow Florentine, Gino Corrado and his brother at the airport welcoming.²⁶

Hal Roach, his wife, and daughter along with Mussolini and his traveling companions drove to Roach’s home in Beverly Hills escorted by police. Protests were expected from Jewish and African-American groups, but never materialized, prompting one policeman to remark, “...no communists, no film queens, no flowers, no nothing...it’s too early in the morning.”²⁷

After resting two days, Mussolini was given an extensive tour of the homes of movieland beginning with opulent Beverly Hills. The six-mile square city had seven miles of bridle paths and was located away from Los Angeles, separated by undeveloped tracts.²⁸ Movie people were first to settle there because of spacious home lots and the construction of the new Fox and MGM studios in adjacent areas. With this nouveaux

²⁵ “Son of Il Duce Arrives to See Films Made Here,” *Los Angeles Times* 26 September 1937, 1. See also “Esta Vittorio Mussolini en Hollywood Ya,” *La Opinion*, 26 September 1937, 1. In his taped interview with Cappello, Corrado states that he met Mussolini at the airport.

²⁶ Mussolini’s Son Arrives in Hollywood, Praises California,” *San Mateo Times*, 25 September 1937, 3.

²⁷ “Son of Il Duce Arrives to See Films Made Here,” *Los Angeles Times* 26 September 1937, 1-2.

²⁸ Clinton H. Anderson, *Beverly Hills is My Beat* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 18.

riche deferring to the styles of older wealth, one of the dominant architectural styles in the city was English Tudor, with the other being “Mediterranean Colonial”—a polyglot of styles that included Californian, Spanish Colonial, and Italian Villa.²⁹ Mussolini likely viewed the homes of several of his favorite stars and directors including Pickfair, the mansion built by Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford (which was only occupied by recently divorced Pickford). Also topping the list were the sprawling estates of comedians Harold Lloyd and just further down Summit Drive was the neighboring six-acre fortified baronial mansion of international superstar Charlie Chaplin. Other homes likely on the tour included that of Gloria Swanson, and the hilltop mansion of George Fitzmaurice, the director of *The Eternal City* which had featured a short appearance by Il Duce shortly after he came to power. Several stars in the 1920s built their mansions in the style of the villas of Tuscany or Rome—such as Buster Keaton—and employed Italian gardeners and landscapers. These houses seemed reminiscent to the young Mussolini of his family’s own state residence in Rome—the nineteenth-century Villa Torlonia. Mussolini made commentary on the good taste of the homes in the community, the beautiful climate, and opined further that “with the flowers and shrubs in bloom, Beverly Hills approaches closely the things we ourselves have in Italy more than anything I have seen yet.”³⁰

²⁹ Merry Ovnick, *Los Angeles: The End of the Rainbow* (Los Angeles: Balcony Press, 1994), 171-172.

³⁰ “Il Duce Son Impressed by Local Homes,” *Beverly Hills Citizen*, 1 October 1937, 1.

Il Duce's son was likely taken to the home of who was undoubtedly Beverly Hills' most famous Italian resident, Tito Schipa. An internationally acclaimed opera star that had appeared in several short musical films and was, by some accounts, reaching the popularity of Caruso, Schipa sang at the King of Italy's son's wedding only a few years earlier. A devoted fascist and one of Il Duce's favorite tenors, Schipa had previously met the young Mussolini in Italy. Schipa may have unofficially invited Il Duce's son and invited guests to his Florentine-style villa as he had aspirations to be an actor, and may have hoped, like several others of the colonia, to get a movie contract for the *Rigoletto* film as he had sung the lead on a *Rigoletto* opera only a few years earlier.³¹ Shipa's son Carlo, had played a few uncredited roles in films playing taxi drivers or waiters in the late 1920s and early '30s, and judging by his publicity photos might have wanted, like more than a few young Italian actors—Corrado included—to fill a vacuum for Latin lovers left by the death of Valentino. In any case, a meeting before Mussolini faced reporters, likely the very next morning, would have been beneficial.³²

Vittorio Mussolini was driven to Roach Studios where he met the press in a room with fake walls and high ceilings known as Sound Stage One. Mussolini sat on a director's chair with Mario Del Papa at his side, a film producer from Rome that served as his translator, while fielding questions from eleven newspapermen, three fan magazine

³¹ "Rigoletto" Role Will Be Sung by Schipa Protégé," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 April 1935, A10.

³² "Schipa to Appear at Philharmonic," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 April 1940, A9.

writers, a studio stenographer, and recorded for news reels by three reporters, and his pictures taken by seven news photographers.

Called on by Roach, Corrado was also at Vittorio Mussolini's press conference as an interpreter. Corrado later explained: "I was the interpreter because Mussolini's son didn't speak English. He had a couple secretaries—but both didn't speak English. So I was called to be an interpreter because I spoke good Italian. Pure Italian—no dialect."³³

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35.00	.32	.35	

HAL ROACH STUDIOS, INC.

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Figure 7. Paid his day rate by Roach, Corrado served as an interpreter for Mussolini at the studio.

Corrado was sharply dressed and likely part of his entourage. He may have also served as a tour guide. Only a few weeks earlier, Corrado had been working on the adjacent stage in *The Big Broadcast of 1937*, a Little Rascals (Our Gang) vehicle, where he played an opera singer. Through Corrado's translation, Mussolini explained to reporters under the high ceiling of the sound stage that his aims to reorganize the Italian film industry, beginning with the joint venture with Roach to include Italian capital and actors—but American technical experience—to make films. The first would be an opera,

³³ Gino Corrado interview with Bill Cappello, Sherman Oaks, CA, 4 May 1976, Tape 2.

Rigoletto, in later publicity revealed to be a Laurel and Hardy comedy also starring two Italian starlets and American actress Rosina Lawrence.³⁴

That night, the Roaches threw a huge party to celebrate both young Mussolini's twenty-first birthday and the Roaches' twenty-first wedding anniversary. It is unknown if Corrado attended the party, but he likely did. The *Los Angeles Times* described the event as "one of the most brilliant social events of the season."³⁵ Over 300 members of the Hollywood film colony attended, including actors Dolores Del Rio, Spencer Tracy, Charles Boyer, Leo Carrillo, Gary Cooper, Bing Crosby, Douglas Fairbanks, Al Jolson, Harold Lloyd, Ginger Rogers, Gloria Swanson, Janet Gaynor, Antonio Moreno, Errol Flynn, George Raft, and Lionel Barrymore among others. Also present were directors, producers, and moguls Sam Wood, Cecil B. DeMille, Darryl Zannuck, Carl Laemmle Jr., Walt Disney, Ernst Lubitsch, and George Fitzmaurice.³⁶

A gigantic canvas tent was stretched over the Roaches' tennis courts, where two alternating orchestras (one Hawaiian, the other popular dance music) entertained the guests. The food included four international styles served by costumed waiters from buffet stations at the corners of the tent. Chinese fare was served by character actor Chester Gan, who usually played a Chinese cook or laundryman on film. Besides Spanish and Southern food, there was Italian cuisine, dished out to the guests by Paul Porcasi, a

³⁴ "Il Duce's Son Tells of Aims," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 September 1937, 3.

³⁵ Isabel Sheldon, "Mr. and Mrs. Hal Roach Mark Anniversary at Birthday Party for Son of Il Duce," *Los Angeles Times* 3 October 1937. D6.

³⁶ Ibid.

Sicilian character actor who was better known for playing cigar toting tough guys rather than a waiter.³⁷ One may marvel at the fact that Corrado would have known the majority of the actors (such as Douglas Fairbanks) and the food servers (Corrado had already appeared in a dozen pictures with Porcasi, for instance) and would not have been out of place if he had been in attendance. Corrado could have easily socialized with directors, as well as party host Hal Roach and the birthday boy himself, had he been in attendance, or perhaps less likely, though still possible, working the event as a waiter.³⁸

Life magazine carried the story of the new film venture on October 11, 1937, and showed pictures of Vittorio Mussolini dancing with both Roach's wife and daughter at the party. One small photo showed a cake that Roach had ordered for Mussolini's birthday, "adorned with Fascist soldier and the liner Rex." Still, the major publicity disaster for Roach was the top photograph which measured half the page and, incredibly, showed Roach playfully taking lessons from the Italian dictator's oldest son on modeling the "Mussolini pose" (open knuckles above hips, chest puffed out, and chin up).³⁹

Benito Mussolini may have hoped to restore the ailing Italian film industry to new glories by using a similar blueprint used with the national Italian soccer team. Through the controversial use of international assistance (the national team borrowed two

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Several original photographic negatives from a newspaper reporter (possibly from *Hollywood Citizen*) that attended that night help to paint the picture of the gala event. Although hardly complete, Corrado was not featured in any of these. These negatives are included in the Gino Corrado Collection.

³⁹ "Life on the American Newsfront: Vittorio Teaches Hollywood the Mussolini Pose," *Life* 11 October 1937, 31.

Argentinians of Italian descent to help the team to the finals) and the construction of massive monumental stadiums, he promoted soccer as a tool to build a national culture. The national team was the World Cup defending champion who were hoping to achieve a repeat victory in 1938 in France.⁴⁰ Roach, a sports fan himself, attempted to demonstrate to the dictator's son the very exciting American phenomenon of college football. Roach took Mussolini to a University of Southern California Trojans football game where the low-scoring match (a 7-0 at-home loss to the University of Washington) and intricate rules proved to be both boring and confusing to the young Mussolini whose puzzled gaze at the field actually made a small photographic news feature.⁴¹

The most financially successful Italian resident in Los Angeles was winemaker Secondo Gausti who entertained the young Mussolini with a formal Italian banquet at his mansion in the West Adams district. Gausti invited representatives mainly from groups such as the local Dante Alighieri Society and other artist and literary associations. If Corrado joined the festivities, he, along with any of his brothers and several other Italians experienced in the motion picture business, would have been adept in giving the young Mussolini his first tutorial on the detailed inner-workings of Hollywood. The conversation in Italian likely reflected what those in attendance were familiar with, which for starters, was food and nightlife, as many in the colonia were connected to catering or

⁴⁰ Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game Under Mussolini* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2004), 66. "Il Duce Demand Met in Overtime: Last Time World Cup was in Italy, Home Team was Told 'Win...or Else,'" 4 June 1990 *Los Angeles Times*, C1.

⁴¹ "Young Mussolini Puzzled by American Football," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 October 1937, A13.

food manufacturing. (The young Mussolini may have applied something he learned about peddling traditional Italian cuisine so far away from the motherland, because after the war he was the owner of several restaurants in Argentina.) More prickly business was also likely to have been discussed with the colonia such as new technology with sound and dubbing, the international financing of pictures, and the obstacle of international Jewry and anti-fascist groups in the motion picture industry, before Mussolini made his way, likely the very next morning, to the airport.⁴²

The young Mussolini left Los Angeles to go sightseeing. He first flew to San Francisco. The Golden Gate city was home to over 27,000 Italian immigrants and more than 30,000 American-born persons of Italian parentage, making the community about 9 percent of the total population of San Francisco (637,000 at the time).⁴³ Here the young Mussolini was welcomed by a thriving Italian community and counted multiple fraternal groups, Italian-language radio shows that included one program by Italian silent film actor Guido Trento (whom Corrado had worked with after Trento had moved to Hollywood from Rome), and several rival Italian-language newspapers. Although earlier that year, an anti-fascist newspaper, *Corriere del Popolo* had launched a campaign against

⁴² A photograph in the possession of Gloria Ricci-Lothrop shows her mother (an artist and writer) along with several other prominenti proudly posing with Vittorio Mussolini at a long dinner table. Thus, with this being my main clue, I have based much of this paragraph on speculation and conjecture to recreate the meeting. See also Gatto, *Los Angeles's Little Italy*, 37-38. Secondo gausti's Beaux Arts residence was at 2700 West Adams.

⁴³ Stefano Luconi, "Mussolini's Italian-American Sympathizers in the West: Mayor Angelo J. Rossi and Fascism" in Janet T. Worrall, Carol Bonomo Albright, and Elvira G. Di Fabio (eds), *Italian Immigrants Go West: The Impact of Locale on Ethnicity* (Chicago Heights, IL: American Historical Association, 2003), 127.

Italian-funded after-school (dopo scuola) programs that were infused with pro-fascist textbooks and nationalist curriculum, San Francisco's Italians were overwhelmingly pro-Mussolini.⁴⁴

Vittorio Mussolini was personally invited to San Francisco by Mayor Angelo J. Rossi, the city's first Italian-American mayor. This may have been at the behest of the Italian Ambassador to the United States who was accompanying Mussolini, as a few months earlier the ambassador had toured Italian consulates in America and had met with many Italian leaders in San Francisco, including those of the Italian Chamber of Commerce of California.⁴⁵ Rossi, San Francisco's three-term mayor, unofficially met with the young Mussolini, and later said that if he would have been given more notice he would have given him a key to the city.⁴⁶ Other "prominenti" that had been in contact with Mussolini's representatives, and thus may have met with Il Duce's son on the visit, included the state leaders of the Sons of Italy, and the President of the Bank of Italy, A.H.

⁴⁴ Bénédicte Deschamps, "Opposing Fascism in the West: The Experience of *Il Corriere del Popolo* in San Francisco in the late 1930s," in Italian Historical Association, Janet T. Worrall, Carol Bonomo Albright, and Elvira G. Di Fabio, (eds.), *Italian Immigrants Go West: The Impact of Locale on Ethnicity* (Chicago Heights, IL: American Historical Association, 2003), 118.

⁴⁵ Letter, dated 2 June 1937, sent to Guido Musto, President of the Ceracolo Italian Club, from M.L. Perasso, President of the Italian Chamber of Commerce of California. In the author's possession. See also "Duce's Son Leaves Quietly after Legal Battle Breaks," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 1937, 1.

⁴⁶ Stefano Luconi, "Mussolini's Italian-American Sympathizers in the West: Mayor Angelo J. Rossi and Fascism" in American Italian Historical Association, Worrall, Albright, and Di Fabio, (eds.), *Italian Immigrants Go West*, 130.

Giannini (whose brother in Los Angeles was a banker and board member of United Artists).⁴⁷

Arguably, San Francisco was the most successful Italian community in America. The city's Italians had some political muscle and hosted many important dignitaries at Casa Coloniale Fugazi, which was the de facto Italian community center in North Beach, the area where many Italians clustered. What exactly the young Mussolini's unofficial reception was like is unknown. However, one printed speech from 1934, may be an indicator of the pomp given to political officials from Italy, as the vice-president of the University of California had given an address for a banquet of the Italy America Society honoring the visit of the Italian ambassador to the United States where he ended with: "In behalf of this city, bearing the name of a saint who was born and dwelt in your land, in behalf of the state which in so many ways resembles your home, in behalf of this people which appreciates your great contributions to civilization and loves your lakes and bays, your cities and even your villages, I bid you welcome."⁴⁸

The Cenacolo Italian Club was the club of cultured elite of the city. Almost an Italian country club, their roster contained the names of many top-level Italian professionals. The Cenacolo occupied a large suite in the top floor of the opulent

⁴⁷ Bénédicte Deschamps, "Opposing Fascism in the West: The Experience of *Il Corriere del Popolo* in San Francisco in the late 1930s," in Italian Historical Association, Worral, Albright, and Di Fabio (eds.), *Italian Immigrants Go West*, 118.

⁴⁸ "The address of "Doctor Monroe Deutsch, Honoring His Excellency Augusto Rosso, Italian Ambassador to the United States (Printed by the University of California Press for the Italy America Society) July 1935. In the author's possession. Ambassador Rosso spent a whole day watching films being made at MGM. See "Italy Envoy Sees Films in Making," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 November 1934, A1.

Fairmont Hotel in the city's Nob Hill neighborhood, and similar to the Dante Alighieri Society, held luncheons, cultural meetings and recitals, and sponsored several concerts of the San Francisco Civic Orchestra. The group also had political duties that made it a major representative of the San Francisco Italian-American community's cultural aspirations. The young Mussolini likely met with at least some representative of this group in his visit.

In San Francisco, the young Mussolini gave a rare interview to the press. He made sure to speak very slowly, claiming that he was misquoted in previous interviews by the American reporters. He argued that he visited Hollywood as a movie producer, not as a politician, and, perhaps in an attempt to avoid political commentary, asked that Americans not "think of me not as Il Duce's son." A few days earlier, President Franklin Roosevelt had just made his famous "Quarantine Speech" where the president orated that in order to maintain peace, those nations that were spending as much as fifty percent of their national budget for war armaments and were violating specific treaties should be treated as a contagion and thus quarantined and sanctioned by the international community.⁴⁹ Although the young Mussolini was not on any official state business, he was asked about the speech and responded to reporters that Italy only wanted peace not war. However, the newspaper headlines of the interview contrasted with another story of

⁴⁹ www.millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3310

the same day—that of 20-year-old Bruno Mussolini, Vittorio’s younger brother, who went to fight in the Spanish Civil War despite his mother’s plea that he stay in Rome.⁵⁰

Vittorio Mussolini left San Francisco for Washington, DC but his plane first made a quick stop in Salt Lake City. Scandinavians (such as Corrado’s wife Zella who was raised in the Mormon faith in Utah) and Anglos ranked at the top, and the Mormon church controlled most facets of life in the state. In contrast to San Francisco, the thousand or so Italian families living in Salt Lake City ranked at the bottom of the social hierarchy along with Greeks, Slavs, Japanese, Native Americans, and the few Hispanics located there. The Italians were scattered but lived mostly around the railroad yard in boarding houses with no Little Italy section.⁵¹

Mussolini’s United Airlines flight arrived in Salt Lake City at 12:15 A.M., almost an hour behind schedule. A delegation from the small Italian community waited outside for an hour-and-a-half in the 36 degree weather to welcome him, but he remained sleeping in his seat, much to their disappointment.⁵² The plane then continued to Washington, DC where President Roosevelt and the Italian Ambassador to the United States had tea with Mussolini. The President asked him if he could extend an invitation to his father that the leaders meet on a ship on neutral waters in the mid-Atlantic to discuss strategies to contain the aggression of Germany and the Soviet Union. Il Duce later

⁵⁰ “Bruno Goes Despite Plea by Mother,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, 7 October 1937, 1.

⁵¹ Rocco C. Siciliano and Drew M. Ross, *Walking on Sand: The Story of an Immigrant Son and the Forgotten Art of Public Service* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2004), 7-8.

⁵² “Son of Il Duce Leaves,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, 7 October 1937, 1.

refused to meet on the grounds that Roosevelt had little knowledge of the complexities of European affairs.⁵³

Vittorio Mussolini flew back to Rome after a successful 20-day trip to America. Along with his film venture with Hal Roach, the young Mussolini had met with many leading Italians in California and New York. He had spent the bulk of his time, twelve days, (two more than originally planned) in Hollywood.⁵⁴ However, it can be argued that the trip was not a success from a publicity standpoint as the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League fabricated that Mussolini's trip was a disaster. Their claims were, perhaps alluding to a fear of a blacklist, that Hollywood had snubbed the young Mussolini; his film venture with Roach was cancelled through threat of boycott; and that "Mussolini Junior" admitted defeat and high-tailed it back to Italy. Though there was little, if any, truth in the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League propaganda, it was fed to news services and several newspaper editors in key national markets evidently thought it made good print, especially when the story could be placed on the front page to weaken an accompanying article about Il Duce's dream of an empire.

Several of the moguls, including Sam Goldwyn and Jack Warner, made financial contributions to the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, though their official membership is unknown. The organization grew to be a very vocal political organization, funded in part

⁵³ *Long Beach Independent*, 7 December 1955, 6.

⁵⁴ "Son of El Duce Leaves," *Berkeley Daily Gazette* 7 October 1937, 1. Mussolini's time in Hollywood was not cut short but ended "because the time of his visit expired," and "he had planned to stay in Hollywood only ten days," Hal Roach told reporters.

by the Soviet Union, whose mission was to expose the rising tide of fascism within the American motion picture industry. Despite the press reporting of the dissolving of the Hal Roach-Mussolini partnership, and the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League's claim that they had sent him packing (the League's spokesman later bragged that they "made it so hot for young Mussolini that he flew back to papa"), in actuality it now seemed much of the negotiations continued but remained behind closed doors.⁵⁵

A meeting of the Board of Directors of Era Films (essentially, the R.A.M. venture which included a few Americans that Roach sent to Rome) espoused high hopes that the company would soon become one of Europe's largest film companies and produce a succession of films making it the most important in Italy and Europe.⁵⁶ The company's meeting notes read: "Era Films [should] not be constituted to produce one film only, but rather for a vast and continuous program of production." Perhaps Corrado was one of those considered for employment in Italy: "The elements, who have come from the United States and who will yet come within a very short while, must be considered in this first phase of activity of Era Films as part of the foundation of the company."⁵⁷ Several multi-language versions of the R.A.M. films were planned to be made. Ironically, interpreter problems delayed collaborative writing between the American and Italian

⁵⁵ Jonathan Miles, *Otto Katz: The Many Lives of a Soviet Spy* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2010), 162-163.

⁵⁶ "Meeting of the Board of Directors of Era Films, 5 January 1938, 2. Box 21; 8, Hollywood Museum Collection (Hal Roach Material) University of Southern California, Cinematic Arts Library.

⁵⁷ "Meeting of the Board of Directors of Era Films, 5 January 1938, 2. Box 21; 8, Hollywood Museum Collection (Hal Roach Material) USC Cinematic Arts Library. See also letter dated 13 January 1938 from Warren Doane to Hal Roach where Doane reports the high morale of the "people associated locally."

writers. What was revealed was that comedy-dramas would be staged luxuriously, with Italian/French versions, along with an English version, described in a manner perhaps to quell any anxiety about direct competition with any American companies, read as released for “England and the English-speaking colonies.”⁵⁸

A columnist in *Boxoffice* magazine summed up the prevailing confusion:

“When Vittorio shook a hostile Hollywood from his heels and repaired post-haste to safer Rome, the impression, partially apparent in newspaper statements and more definitely indicated by that which ran between the lines, was the deal was cold. What, since, has happened and is now coming to light pre-determined tactics agreed upon, once the original clamor has died down?” Offering further advice, the columnist, after detailing the studio head’s investment interests in the Santa Anita Race Track and a jewelry business, attacked his ego: “It surmises that Roach, who makes pictures, runs a racetrack, sells diamonds and who is a pretty big shot as Hollywood figures big shots, continues to feel he has made a smart deal which gives him social stature in certain Hollywood quarters; a deal that places him in some sort of international aura of importance.”⁵⁹

But while many in Hollywood were confused, Corrado, however, was likely on the inside. Several months after Vittorio Mussolini’s departure, the *New York Times* learned that the young Mussolini had left one of Hollywood’s Italian bit players, Genarro

⁵⁸ Letter, dated 13 January 1938, (on Era letterhead) from Warren Doane to Roach. Box 21;8, Hollywood Museum Collection (Hal Roach Material) USC Cinematic Arts Library, Special Collections. Giovanni Pugliese was an interpreter and writers Warren Doane and Jennie MacPherson had been sent from Hollywood to Rome by Roach.

⁵⁹ *Boxoffice*, 26 February 1938, 8.

Curci, with the instructions to gather a technical staff in America to make a musical in Rome starring Italian opera star Tito Schipa. The Naples-born Genarro Curci was the former brother-in-law of opera diva Amelita Galli-Curci and her former voice coach, and he had also coached Schipa—his two singers having achieved super-stardom in both American and Italy.⁶⁰ In addition to teaching voice, Genarro Curci was a playwright, opera singer, and musician. He was also a working actor that by 1938 was typecast in waiter roles, and thus probably sympathized with Corrado. Curci was reported to have been in negotiations with director Alexander Hall (the boyfriend of actress Lucille Ball) and cameraman Henry Freulich for a scheduled project to begin April 1, 1938 at Cinecittà in Rome. Though Corrado received no reference in the brief article, he had worked with all the parties listed (Hall, Freulich, and Curci) in several projects in 1937 and 1938. For instance, he played alongside Curci in restaurant scenes in at least six pictures that included *The Great Garrick* and the Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera* in 1935, as well as foreign melodramas *Espionage* in 1937 and—an ironically titled film where the two were likely to have talked about working in Italy—*A Trip to Paris* released in 1938.⁶¹

The only leading American actress that was contracted for the R.A.M. venture was Rosina Lawrence. The attractive platinum blond was to star in *Rigoletto* with Laurel

⁶⁰ David Bruno Usher, *Who's Who in Music and Dance in Southern California* (Hollywood, CA: Bureau of Musical Research, 1933), 182 and 285. Genarro Curci was listed as being the exclusive vocal coach of his sister, and his music studio was located in Hollywood at 7079 Hawthorne Avenue not far from Corrado's home.

⁶¹ "News of the Screen." *New York Times*, 20 January 1938, 19. See also "Genarro M. Curci, Voice Teacher, 66," *New York Times*, 15 April 1955, 23. By 1938, Corrado had appeared in *Air Hawks* (1935) shot by Freulich, and was directed by Alexander Hall in *Goin' To Town* (1935), *Give Us This Night* (1936), and *There's that Woman Again* (1937).

and Hardy (and where presumably Corrado would be an assistant director) and had already appeared in a Laurel and Hardy short and in other Roach comedies including the Our Gang series where she often played a teacher. *Variety* magazine titled a short article about her return as “Rosina Lawrence back from Italy chore” reporting that the actress would resume her career in Los Angeles after *Rigoletto*.⁶²

So what really happened to the Roach-Mussolini venture? Did Roach fear reprisals from anti-fascists for his collaboration with the young Mussolini? Was he blacklisted from having his company’s films distributed by MGM? Actually, the reasons for the dissolution was likely more business-related: Roach’s bank would not finance the picture; there was difficulty getting MGM’s impounded Lira in Italy as he had always been paid in dollars in the past; he did not like the arrangement of providing a guarantee on the pictures produced as he thought an Italian bank was going to finance them completely; and the hectic schedule at Roach Studios took up the majority of his time.⁶³

Furthermore, Roach experienced strained relations with his main stars, Laurel and Hardy, the planned leads of the R.A.M. venture. Though Roach did renew the option on their contract, which expired November 12, 1937, the quality of their work seemed to be declining with tastes in humor changing. Roger Marchetti was a tour guide for Vittorio

⁶² “Rosina Lawrence back from Italy Chore,” *Variety*, 26 July 1938, 8. In her stopover in New York, Lawrence apparently met Judge Juvenal Marchisio whom she later wed. See *Variety*, 29 June 1939, 18.

⁶³ Two page Western Union Telegram, no date (circa 24 January 1938) from Hal Roach to ERA Films (Mussolini), Rome. (Box 21:5)—Folder “M.” Hollywood Museum Collection (Hal Roach material), USC, Cinematic Arts Library. Writing a year after the Mussolini visit, Hedda Hopper claims that at the gala party stars were happy to be photographed with him. “But when lush reports of his reception were aired about the country—and found disfavor—the same stars felt differently about it. Then he [Mussolini] found himself most unwelcome.” Hedda Hopper’s Hollywood, *Los Angeles Times* 5 December 1938, 26.

Mussolini and during his visit was a top Hollywood attorney that was briefly representing both wives of the comedy duo who were suing them for spousal support. The news of the double divorces were big headlines along with sordid and sensationalized details of abuse and Stan Laurel's wedding with a young Russian singer, his third wife, whose nuptial legality was contested by his second wife.⁶⁴ The big contracts, bad publicity, and shrinking of overseas markets surely hurt the box office. Corrado's commentary was simply that "Laurel and Hardy broke Hal Roach"—perhaps indicating that Corrado was briefly in Roach's circle and had heard his side of the story.⁶⁵

In an effort to reestablish himself, Roach moved from producer to director with his own screwball comedy A-pictures. He left MGM and was one of five independent producers distributed by United Artists. Furthermore, after feeble releases and inferior /summer films and a subsequent slump in audience attendance, trade magazines made public many of the complaints of both exhibitors in America eventually spurring an industry-wide promotional campaign in 1938 called "Motion Pictures' Greatest Year" that attempted to put the public in the centrality of making films, such as those in which Roach had participated.⁶⁶

If Vittorio Mussolini used these reasons as excuses for backing out of the contract, Roach pleaded with him in a telegram, "Please believe that when in Italy I felt my

⁶⁴ Simon Louvish, *Stan and Ollie* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2005), 362-363.

⁶⁵ Bill Cappello interview with Gino Corrado, 4 May, 1976. Tape 2.

⁶⁶ Catherine Jurca, *Hollywood 1938: Motion Pictures Greatest Year* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 23-25; 98.

productions needed much less supervision than now apparent and therefore believe someone who could devote their entire time to Italian production who also comprehends world picture conditions much more suited than myself to make success of ERA [R.A.M].”⁶⁷

Friendly correspondence in the months that followed between Hal Roach and Vittorio Mussolini, reveals that both parties were open to working together in some capacity in the face of strained international political relations, particularly involving the film business. In regards to the distribution of American films, the young Mussolini sought recommendations of good films and a list of producers from the knowledgeable Roach, claiming, “It must be clearly understood that these requests of mine have only one aim and that is to contribute something toward the resumption of normal motion picture relations between Italy and the U.S.A.”⁶⁸ But a few weeks after Britain’s declaration of war on Germany, both Italy and America were still officially neutral when Roach wrote to the young Mussolini about a distribution deal for Italy. Roach hoped to make another visit to Rome when the conditions in Europe permitted and sent a message for him to convey to Il Duce: “The majority of the American people are hoping and praying that your father, because of his friendship to both sides of the warring countries will in some

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Letter, dated 18 September 1939, on Aquila Films (Rome) letterhead from Vittorio Mussolini to Hal Roach. (Box 21:5)—Folder “M.” Hollywood Museum Collection (Hal Roach material), USC, Cinematic Arts Library, Special Collections.

way be able to stop this major disaster so that once again Peace will come to all countries.”⁶⁹

The dissolving of the Hal Roach-Vittorio Mussolini partnership most likely explains why Corrado never went to Italy, if he was, in fact, officially guaranteed an assistant director position. Curci also stayed in Hollywood. Corrado remembered many years later, “I could have gone to Rome on a contract, \$500 a week, furnishing maid, apartment, a car at my disposal—\$500 a week for the duration—one year, maybe more.” Strangely, one of the main reasons that Corrado did not go to Italy, at least the way he told it several decades later, was his fear of heights: “I didn’t go because I had to fly.” He went on to cite that the very plane he would have taken actually crash-landed at the airport in Rome killing several members of the film crew. “A few fellas got killed—it could have been me.”⁷⁰

Corrado’s contract in Rome with \$500 per week with amenities was high but not an outlandish salary for the Mussolini venture, or one related to it, because other salaries were comparable for the use of American technicians in Italy.⁷¹ The state-run ENIC had

⁶⁹ Letter (secretarial copy) dated 15 October 1939 From Hal Roach to Vittorio Mussolini. (Box 21:5)—Folder “M.” Hollywood Museum Collection (Hal Roach material), USC, Cinematic Arts Library, Special Collections.

⁷⁰ Bill Cappello interview with Gino Corrado, 4 May, 1976. Tape 1.

⁷¹ A four-page Western Union telegram dated 23 January 1938 from L.L. Lawrence (European Representative of MGM in Europe) and Vittorio Mussolini sent to Hal Roach list foreign currency salaries for the scenarist Adrian Brunel (from London) as \$5,000 for six weeks (the length of the picture), and the unnamed director at \$15,000 for the picture. For comparison, Italian nationals seemed to be paid much less. Giovanni Pugliese, an interpreter for Warren Doane in Rome cost him personally only 400 lire (less than \$50 dollars a week), Eugenia Handamir a “script girl” who did translation received \$450 Lire. See Box 21:8, Folder “Senise vs. Roach,” Hollywood Museum Collection (Hal Roach Material), USC, Cinematic Arts Library.

planned several pictures produced in two versions (Italian and English languages), the latter using an American director, cameraman, writer, and cast. In fact, two biographical pictures about the historical figures Christopher Columbus and Leonardo DaVinci were being reported by the American press as in the pipeline after *Scipione l'Africano*.⁷²

But what did Italians working in the world's motion picture capital, like Corrado, think of the Vittorio Mussolini's historic visit? What did it represent to them?

⁷² "Italian Film to Cost Millions," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February 1937, 10.

CHAPTER TEN:
HEBREW HOLLYWOOD:
WORKER DISSENT AND ANTI-SEMITISM
IN THE MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY

There were dynasties in those days and they intermarried. The chief of the casting department was the double brother-in-law of B.P. Schulberg. That is to say, he was the brother of Mrs. Schulberg and his wife was Schulberg's sister. There was a story of a studio where a relationship something like this existed and the boss one night won thousands of dollars from his relative playing poker and then the next day raised the latter's wages so that he could settle it. No doubt the story was apocryphal. But the solidarity was not. Up against it, what could you do?

Ivor Montagu, *With Eisenstein in Hollywood*.¹

In 1938, only a year after the young Mussolini visited Hollywood, four Hollywood studios opted to withdraw their yearly 200 films from distribution in Italy rather than deal with a newly created film monopoly set up by the fascist government. The decision prompted scorn by Vittorio Mussolini. In his *Cinema* journal, the young Mussolini worried about how to fill the gap until the Italian film industry could meet the demand, but reassured his readers: "Personally and politically I am content that American

¹ Ivor Goldsmid Samuel Montagu and Sergei Eisenstein, *With Eisenstein in Hollywood; A Chapter of Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), 109-110.

films produced in that Hebrew Communist center which is Hollywood are not to enter Italy.”²

What would Corrado have thought about such a statement that was widely quoted in the American press? Quite possibly, Corrado felt no shock or betrayal at such a critique of his industry. More than likely he was in agreement. In fact, there are clues that Corrado may have informed Il Duce’s son of a “monopoly” in Hollywood, as he was an interpreter and guide to him and had the opportunity to have detailed working conditions.

If there was conversation with Mussolini about Corrado’s personal experience as a studio employee, which there likely was, there is no doubt the actor would have explained the extent of communist sympathy and the prevalence of Jewish executives within the motion picture industry. Although technically a mischaracterization, most Jews were not communists, and, most rank and file, communists were not Jews), the story is more complicated when considering that several of the moguls such as Irving Thalberg, Louis B. Mayer, and Harry Cohn were politically conservative and supportive of the New Italy. The latter two proudly displayed signed pictures of Benito Mussolini in their offices and were sympathetic to Italian fascism, at least as an efficient alternative to communism. However, Corrado’s employers, which included all the major studio moguls, would have viewed Vittorio Mussolini’s comments as having mischaracterized the industry’s Jewish executives and part of a larger international wave of anti-Semitism.

² “Vittorio Mussolini Worried as U.S. Films are Held from Italy,” *Syracuse Herald*, 26 November 1938, (page 1). The Associated Press article appeared the next day in the *New York Times* (page 37) and the *Los Angeles Times* (page 10).

Was Corrado anti-Semitic? And if so, what exactly informed Corrado's viewpoint? One clue is found in a personal letter from Corrado's uncle who owned the Italian Antique Gallery in Chicago. Corrado must have complained about the situation as a bit player and the correspondence dated October 2, 1937 is a response to his long-winded letter. One excerpt reads:

I fully understand the difficulties to get the right work in your line as you tell me and I knew that the Jews are monopolizing the business. I surely would accept a position to go to Italy as assistant director and interpreter if I were in you[r shoes], you could save some money besides, living a much finer life than here in America. I think that now is the proper time to strike as I understand that Mussolini's son is in Hollywood now to form his own company. So get busy, don't waist [sic] any time; there may be a good chance for you.³

Although the tone of the letter reads as if Corrado was newly informed of Mussolini's arrival in Hollywood, he was obviously well aware, even before the Italian language press in Los Angeles, and certainly in advance of his uncle, that Mussolini was coming to town. The timing of Corrado's letter was due to the news and anticipation that Vittorio Mussolini, who was strengthening the Italian film industry or at least collaborating with American studios, would make a personal visit to Hollywood. In fact, headlines differed in Chicago than that of Los Angeles; on page five of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* it was titled "Dictator's Son Avoids Reds at the New York Pier: Mussolini in U.S. to Hire Movie Technicians."⁴

³ Letter, dated 2 October 1937, on Italian Antique Galleries letterhead, from Corrado Trevisani (Gino Corrado's uncle) addressed to Gino Corrado Liserani. GCC.

⁴ In comparison, the *Los Angeles Times* title of the 16 September 1937 article on page 12 was "Il Duce's Son on Way Here: Young Mussolini to Hire Hollywood Film Technicians."

Though the letter that Corrado originally wrote to his uncle (described as a long letter) has been lost, this surviving correspondence nevertheless makes several implications about what Corrado's intentions were and may serve as an introspective regarding the personal thoughts of a working actor: specifically that he was convinced that Jews controlled the film industry; he was struggling financially; he was dissatisfied with his position in Hollywood; and he was considering his career possibilities in Italy.

Corrado's sentiments, starting with his uncle's agreement with Corrado regarding the "difficulties getting work" because the "Jews are monopolizing the business" deserve more attention. Many of the problems of the film industry with worker dissatisfaction were due less for the Jewishness of the company's executive roster and more for corporate—often dehumanizing—business practices typical of the era. But the singular explanation, according to movie workers on the bottom, was that Jewish bosses, with their materialism and nepotism, created the worker dissent of 1930s Hollywood. This attitude gave rise to some unsavory caricatures.⁵

Several popular novels released throughout the thirties painted Hollywood as an ugly industry run by sinister Jews. One such book that used this metaphor was authored

⁵ My view that nepotism impeded upward mobility contrasts with sentiments like those by Lary May who wrote: "Then, with the children of immigrants in power, movie making appeared to offer a place where all newcomers could rise on ability, without having to face discriminatory employers or a rigid seniority system." See Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 187. For a critique of the view that the "Jews had too much influence," see James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 89-94. Neil Gabler, in *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (page 208) claims that nepotism was a defense mechanism to surround oneself with one's own kin, and that there was an obligation to support family during the Depression. However, nepotism was a success strategy since the earliest days of movies. For instance, *Variety* routinely reported new executive positions being filled such as that by Beno Rubel: "a brother-in-law of the Stern Brothers, who are nephews of Laemmle." *Variety* 16 February 1927, 10.

by a writer for *Mercury*, an industry magazine that often published articles from the film worker's perspective. Titled simply *Hey Diddle, Diddle*, the book was published in 1932 and was marketed as Hollywood fiction; however, the story was loosely based on real characters. Details such as the character Jake Mandelbaum's (the head of "Mastodon Pictures") highly polished desk (reminiscent of Louis B. Mayer) or his vice president Max Feldman's huge diamond ring on each hand, their excesses of \$1,500 a week plus bonuses, travelling expenses, and Rolls Royce limousines was not much different from the moguls actual extravagant Depression-era lifestyles. Though there are tinges of anti-Semitism in the book hidden in colorful passages: "Mandelbaum arose...puffing vigorously on his cigar...reduced to a length which made it something of a menace to the end of his nose," *Hey Diddle, Diddle* likely spoke to the Hollywood at the bottom—the masses of workers—who, like Corrado, would have enjoyed the book's depiction of a devious, clannish Jewish mogul that staffed "relatives and old friends into as many jobs as possible, for both protective and political reasons." This is best illustrated in the story when the main character promised Feldman, his business partner and future VP: "You don't have to know anything in the movie business, so long as you get the right start in a good job. Employees do all the work and you give the orders." Explained Mandelbaum: "Besides, you can't lose anything because it's someone else's money which is being spent. Anyways, it ain't brains I'm looking for—it's someone I can trust."⁶

⁶ Tamar Lane, *Hey Diddle, Diddle* (New York, NY: The Adelphi Press, 1932), 8; 13.

The excesses of the moguls, only after nepotism, was a major driving factor in worker dissent in the studios. The luxurious lifestyles of these top executives, that could even put movie stars to shame, were never published in studio publicity and rarely published in movie fan magazines, but were written about in novels about Hollywood and would have been known to those on the inside, like Corrado. The public knew little about the moguls' gambling binges in Agua Caliente, Mexico or Hollywood Park racetrack, their lavish parties at Hillcrest Country Club, yachts, or sprawling mansions. For example, Sol Wurtzel, who had briefly represented Corrado and whose casting agency had the connections to land the actor his greatest role as Aramis in *The Iron Mask*, had his stately hilltop manor in Bel Air modeled on the fifteenth century suburban Roman retreat of a wealthy pope.⁷

The wealth held by the movie moguls was mindboggling during Depression-era shortages. By the mid-1930s, film industry leaders in Hollywood and in the corporate headquarters in New York held 19 of the 25 highest paid salaries in the nation. Louis B. Mayer had the much-reported distinction of becoming the highest salaried person in the world for 1937, at 1.3 million dollars a year *plus bonuses*, more than the entire United States Senate combined.⁸

⁷ Steven J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 73. Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 208.

⁸ Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 105.

Many movie workers saw the moguls as a clannish band of robber barons who had commodified an art. The moguls were typified as uneducated, mercenary, crass, commercialists with a pawn-shop mentality. B.P. Schulberg, the second in command who headed production at Paramount, responded with no denial that Hollywood was guided by Jews but argued how, almost single-handedly, they had made the heavy capital investments to develop their industry: “It was the so-called lost tribe of Israel that took the motion picture when it was a despised and lowly thing, and developed it into an art, an amusement and a business.”⁹ Like any titans of industry, the moguls pointed to their creation of jobs and infusion of capital into the local economy—during the nation’s worst depression, no less. However, the business practice of monopolization (on par with capitalists such as the Rockefellers) saw the moguls control the supply (contracted actors); the production (studios); and the distribution (theaters) until the later anti-trust legislation of the next decade.¹⁰

The view of many workers in the industry, including actors and other artists, who likely included Corrado, was that the Jewish moguls had debased the creative art to that of an assembly line factory.¹¹ The average workday for an actor was 12-14 hours a day, sometimes working from 9am until the early morning the next day.¹² Driving the

⁹ Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 73.

¹⁰ May, *Screening Out the Past*, 176.

¹¹ Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 141.

¹² Neil Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* ((New York: Crown Publishers, 1988), 189-191.

workers—and handling these temperamental artists' demands—required dictatorial powers, and although there was some delegation of authority given to the heads of production, the moguls were, in fact, the emperors of their own empires. Virtually everyone, from writers to directors to actors, worked to satisfy the opinion of one man, rather than the public, who would okay everything: the big studio boss.¹³ Margherita Sarfatti, an Italian journalist and art critic from an elite Jewish family, best known as Mussolini's biographer and mistress, visited Hollywood and commented that Louis B. Mayer's and other moguls' power over actors was similar to that which Il Duce held over the Italian people—a statement taken as a high compliment.¹⁴ Both moguls Mayer and Cohn paid tribute to the world's most famous political strongman with their offices, almost exact copies of Mussolini's office—a large sparse white room containing a shiny, circular desk raised high where visitors sat nervously below eye level.¹⁵

The moguls carved up Hollywood with their own studios serving as fiefdoms. All branches of service, from the carpenter to the starlet, ultimately answered to their dynastic leader. Studios were small walled cities with a fire department, a telephone exchange, and a power plant. Universal, for instance, had a quasi-official municipal name

¹³ Frank Capra, "Breaking Hollywood's Pattern of Sameness, *New York Times*, 5 May 1946, SM10. Capra wrote, "Thus the creative side of film-making, from the selection of the story, the writers who would put it into script form, the casting of the players, the designing of their costumes and the sets which provided their backgrounds, the direction, the cutting and editing of the final film was tailored (consciously or unconsciously) to the tastes of the studio's head man."

¹⁴ "Italian Writer Welcomed," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1934, A1.

¹⁵ Charles Higham, *Merchant of Dreams: Louis B. Mayer, M.G.M., and the Secret Hollywood* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1993), 273.

(Universal City), post office, and—though Carl Laemmle was the monarch—an honorary mayor. Although there were no medieval serfs that plowed the fields outside the studio gates for a king, Clark Gable's farm in the Valley provided chickens to the MGM commissary, and during the silent era Universal offered chicken eggs produced by captive birds on-site to its visitors when the studio ran public tours. One of the traits of the moguls was their enjoyment of the "sport of kings," best exemplified by Louis B. Mayer and his vast acreage on which he stabled his expensive collection of Eastern-bred bluebloods—perhaps the greatest collection in the world—which included one racehorse he named Stereoopticon.¹⁶

No studio boasted of its own official army, but each studio had a well-trained private police force. Many of these officers had been former city policemen—the chief of police at MGM had been the chief of police for Culver City. The studio security was large enough to enforce traffic safety, handle large crowds at events such as movie premiers and the Academy Awards ceremonies, protect studio property from bandits, and keep undesirables from breaching the ramparts. On rare occasion, the big boss unleashed the studio police internally on his employees as was the basis of a lawsuit in mid-1937

¹⁶ *Moguls and Moviestars: A History of Hollywood*, (Vol. 2 The Birth of Hollywood, 1907-1920) documentary film (Directed by Jon Wilkman. Turner Classic Movies, 2010). Mickey Rooney, *Life is Too Short*, (New York: Villard Books, 1991), 163. Akasha Richmond, *Hollywood Dish: More than 150 Delicious, Healthy Recipes from Hollywood's Chef to the Stars* (New York: Avery, 2006), 57. Paul Lowry, "Santa Anita to Serve as Proving Ground for Colts," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 November 1939, A16. Scott Eyman, *Lion of Hollywood; Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 270.

that involved a Warner Brothers officer illegally detaining union leaders during a labor dispute.¹⁷

The moguls routinely used their influence to protect their industry and they collectively expanded their political power. Besides having connections with local police departments (LAPD, Beverly Hills PD, Burbank PD, and Culver City PD), the local chambers of commerce, and the mayor's office, the studios collectively paid for an ambassador to represent their political interests in the person of Will H. Hays. A former Republican Party chairman who served as the head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, Hays was empowered to maintain the free-trade monopoly that Hollywood enjoyed and he negotiated face-to-face with international world leaders, including Benito Mussolini, on behalf of the studios. Against submitting to any real censorship at home, the studios wrote their own Production Code rather than be subject to outside interference.¹⁸ The studios were intrinsically linked to politics and made a significant influence on the election results of both parties through campaigning and donations. An example of the strategic connections made by the moguls was the son of the president of the United States, James Roosevelt, who was an MGM producer. Thus, one can argue, even the president's son answered to the moguls, in this case, Louis B. Mayer.

¹⁷ "W.P. Hendry, Police Chief for MGM, Dies," *Los Angeles Times* 2 December 1960, B34. The MGM chief of police also served as Culver City's chief of police from 1929 to 1931. "Strike Arrest Ruling Upset," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 December 1939, A10. Considering that Louis B. Mayer was chairman of the California Republican Party and the Warners were major contributors to the Democratic Party, the industry had an enormous influence.

¹⁸ Will H. Hays, *The Memoirs of Will H. Hays* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1955), 508-510.

If anyone was above the moguls it was only their shareholders. But often the largest percentage of shares was held by the mogul dynasties themselves, although moguls were occasionally ousted such as William Fox or Carl Laemmle. Many large outside investors in the film companies had purely commercial intentions such as American Tobacco, DuPont, and Bank of America. The industry was profit-driven to the extreme and, according to Marcus Loew, the head of MGM's corporate headquarters in New York, followed the methods of the chain stores and the largest industries such as AT&T, the railroads, and the automobile industry.¹⁹ Warner Brothers consulted with the Wall Street financial partnership Goldman Sachs, a firm retained due to expansion in the mid-1920s with studio acquisitions and theater-building, and later for the economization after the heavy debts incurred during the transition to sound and the beginning of the Depression. Jack Warner's business inspiration was likely Henry Ford as his Burbank streamlined factory strove to deliver economically-produced pictures for the enjoyment of a mass audience.²⁰

Anti-Semitism

Whether Corrado was truly anti-Semitic is difficult to tell from his correspondence and later interviews. Corrado, however, was alarmed by the power he perceived Jews holding in Hollywood.²¹ From Corrado's viewpoint in 1937, Jews had

¹⁹ May, *Screening out the Past*, 178-179.

²⁰ Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 59-60; 136.

²¹ Gabler, *How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, 278. Gabler writes that "Within Hollywood itself there was a mumbling about Jewish control. For some it was the handiest rationale for thwarted dreams." I argue that

quickly risen to become the heads of almost all the studios, an effort Corrado and many other gentiles privately decried as being due to ethnic prejudice and nepotism. Three inter-related families reigned at the top: the Mayers, the Selznicks, and the Goetzes.

Louis B. Mayer, who was related by marriage to the other two lines, was often accused of staffing executive positions at MGM with family members.²² The studio that was most infamous for nepotism was Universal. Its founder Carl Laemmle had employed as many as 70 relatives in various positions including his son—“Junior”—who was given the reins of the studio at the approach of the Sound Era when he was only twenty-one years old, only to be forced out by shareholders in 1936 when the studio almost collapsed (and whose young age may have cautioned Vittorio Mussolini).²³ At Columbia the ruthless Harry Cohn, whose employees loathed him, listed twenty-nine Cohns on the studio payroll according to a British columnist working in Hollywood.²⁴ Only when there were

Hollywood’s practice of nepotism and ethnic prejudice may have had a direct effect on the careers of actors like Corrado and deserves to be examined in detail.

²² Bosley Crowther, *Hollywood Rajah: The Life and Times of Louis B. Mayer* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), p. 225. See also Stephen Farber and Marc Green, *Hollywood Dynasties* (New York: Delilah, 1984), 68-69.

²³ Beverly Heisner, *Hollywood Art: Art Direction in the Days of the Great Studios* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1990), 277. See also Gene Fernet, *American Film Studios: An Historical Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1988), 239. A joke around Hollywood was that when the senior Laemmle was told that Albert Einstein was to visit his studio he groaned and said, “With all my family working here, this bum’s gonna come along and tell me anything about *relativity*?”

²⁴ Sheilah Graham, *My Hollywood: A Celebration and Lament* (London, UK: Michael Joseph Limited, 1984), 89. Most of the employees did not like their mogul bosses, with Mayer the most popular amongst his workers and Cohn the worst offender (he preferred to be feared than liked). Zukor also had a problem of low morale in his employees, see Robert S. Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 199.

not enough cousins, quipped one cynical Hollywood novelist, did the moguls start handing out executive jobs to gentiles.²⁵

Corrado, an actor who constantly worked inside different studios, was familiar with the insular world of Hollywood's elite Jews through marriage. Although many Jewish executives chose to marry non-Jews—often young actresses—the top Jewish families formed dynasties between studios which established a larger network of cooperation, such as mogul Samuel Goldwyn whose first marriage was to Jesse Lasky's daughter.²⁶ Corrado was not competing with the top tier of dynastic members—the self-described pioneers—but rather their extended family that an editor of *Los Angeles Times* claimed resulted from so many intermarriages that “it would take an expert genealogist to ferret out all the second cousins.”²⁷

One of the loudest voices to expose Hollywood's Wall Street and Jewish connections as a conspiracy was, ironically, William Fox. The mogul wrote, with the help of Upton Sinclair, a tell-all book called *Upton Sinclair Presents William Fox* to avenge his having been wrongfully deposed from his own company. He attempted to connect the financial demise of his namesake studio to the lack of ethics of Wall Street lawyers,

²⁵ Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 26-27, taken from Charles Ray, “Sans Tarte,” in *Hollywood Shorts* (Los Angeles: California Graphic Press, 1935), 26-27.

²⁶ Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 300-301.

²⁷ “Dynasty of Relatives Rules Hollywood Studios,” *Los Angeles Times* 1 July 1934, A1. The article was a limited attempt at deciphering family ties: “Jack Cummings, supervisor of short subjects at M-G-M; Ruth Cummings, scenarist; and Mitzi Cummins, film writer, are all related to Louis B. Mayer, studio chief. David O. Selznick, producer at Metro, is Mayer's son-in-law, while Myron Selznick, who runs a prosperous agency business, is David's brother. At Universal, of course, are Carl Laemmle and his son Junior; Ernss L. Frank (Laemmle) and Edward Laemmle, who are cousins are now directing; William Wyler, director, a nephew; Stanley Bergerman, Universal executive, married to Rosabelle Laemmle, and there are others.”

Chase Bank executives, and even those within his industry such as the Warner brothers who allegedly made \$9 million by selling their own stocks short.²⁸ The exposé would have bolstered the validity of grievances held by any employees of the newly merged Twentieth Century-Fox corporation where the response to *Upton Sinclair Presents William Fox* was posted notices warning of immediate dismissal to anyone who brought copies of the book onto studio property.²⁹

Hollywood exported amusements to the outside world but the view from inside the studio was often one of dissatisfaction for many of the workers. One example is evident when a young messenger boy of Jewish descent working at Warner's lot in Burbank reported that nearly all 4,500 employees of the studio had an open dislike of Jews:

...I quickly discovered that anti-Semitism in at least that movie studio was rife. The blue collar workers hated the front office bosses. The fact that more than a few executives were Jewish added fuel to fires already being fanned by America Firsters such as that disgrace of a Catholic priest, Father Coughlin. It was interesting that the middle lot people, the straw bosses who ran the dozens of departments on the lot, felt the same way, but they had to hide their feelings. The guys on the backlots didn't. They spoke right out, especially when J.L. Warner called them all together for one of his fund-raising meetings and ordered them to cough up lots of their own money, or else.³⁰

This messenger (who would later become the studio's publicity agent as World War II set in) candidly describes the tension brewing inside the studio gates. Also

²⁸ Upton Sinclair, *Upton Sinclair Presents William Fox* (Los Angeles: The author, 1933), 209, 354.

²⁹ Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 147-148.

³⁰ Arthur Wilde, "*Honestly!*": *Confessions of a Hollywood Press Agent* (Danville, IL: Three Lions Publications, 1999), 15-16.

mentioned was Father Charles Coughlin, a Catholic priest who had a popular national radio show and a newspaper, *Social Justice*, which counted over a million readers and was the loudest voice against expanding refugee quotas at a time when 12 million Americans were unemployed.³¹ As for the fund-raising, the donations likely went to the United Jewish Welfare Fund, which Jack Warner headed along with David Selznick, that aimed to increase the emigration of Jewish movie workers from Europe—a cause likely to inflame non-Jewish employees.³² Less likely, although still possible as the fund, are the myriad of committees with funds that existed in Hollywood which were overtly Pro-British, or at least interventionist, but one of the most successfully funded organizations the Warners supported was the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League whose mission was “to combat Nazism and its agents in the United States” which included persons suspected of fascist leanings.³³

The distrust at Warner Brother’s studio between worker and management fostered Jack Warner’s enlisting of studio employees to spy and report any fascist or anti-Semitic activities they might find on the lot or around Hollywood, creating for Corrado and anyone else who may have opined strongly about studio management or current

³¹ Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 173-174.

³² Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 192.

³³ “Anti-Nazi Leaguers Fight Red Aid Charge,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 August 1938, 6. Tommy Farrell claimed that Jack Warner was not liked by his employees and was cheap. See Paul Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of its Golden Age* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002), 187.

political events, and for especially those actors from Germany and Italy or non-interventionists, a tense atmosphere of surveillance.³⁴

After Hitler nationalized the German film industry in 1933 which effectively barred all Jews, Hollywood moguls such as Lasky, Laemmle, Warner, and Goldwyn made room for the influx (or an *avalanche* by the mid-thirties, according to refugee director Billy Wilder) of Jewish film personnel.³⁵ This would have been taken as bad news by Corrado and is probably the source of the “Jews *are* [in the current process of] monopolizing the business” in the above mentioned letter from Corrado’s uncle, as it can be argued that Jews by 1937 had successfully dominated the industry for decades, but only recently had made room for their ethnic kinsman at the expense of actors like Corrado.

As for casting agents, Paul Kohner, a former head of foreign production at Universal—who was also himself an immigrant Jew from Austria having arrived in the 1920s—became one of the main advocates for these new film arrivals and set up an

³⁴ Randi Hokett, “Waging Warner’s War” in Martin Kaplan and Johanna Blakely (eds.), *Warner’s War: Politics, Pop Culture and Propaganda in Wartime Hollywood* (Los Angeles: Norman Lear Center Press, 2004), 15. Spies and private investigators were well-utilized—arguably routine—in Hollywood since its inception. An example at the top-level would be found in United Artists. The company formed in 1919 as a preemptive move by its founders, Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, D.W. Griffith, and Charlie Chaplin, based upon the report of an attractive female investigator that had seduced an executive from a film company in order to have made him reveal the details of a forty million-dollar merger of several producing companies and exhibitors.³⁴ Studio executives often employed private investigators to tail actors to substantiate rumors of potentially-damaging romantic affairs. And gossip columnists always sought out scoops for their papers, in part with the help of inside informants in Hollywood. See Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, 222.

³⁵ Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History Up to World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 164. See also Gene D. Phillips, *Exiles in Hollywood: Major European Film Directors in America* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1998), 13.

organization, along with director Ernst Lubitsch, to pressure and plead to the studios and employees for donations, called the European Film Fund. One member of the Fund was director William Dieterle, (himself a Jew from Germany with whom Corrado worked under in two pictures in the early 1930s), who personally made it a point to assign bit parts to refugees, such as in *Juarez*, and later lobbied studios to accept émigrés for future productions.³⁶ Perhaps an indicator as to how Jewish the film industry of Weimar Germany actually was: approximately one-third of the film personnel left Germany, with about 500 destined to Hollywood.³⁷

The larger German refugee campaign was of key importance to Jews at the highest level such as with Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, the most influential rabbi in America at the time. Besides leading his large congregation in New York City, Wise hosted a popular radio show, was president of the Zionist Organization of America and president of the American Jewish Congress; the latter routinely lobbied the League of Nations to sanction Germany for its regulations against Jews. Rabbi Wise dreamed of lifting restrictions for emigration from Germany though he preferred refugees to settle in Palestine, where the plan was to use eugenics to populate a future Jewish super state that would expand and dominate the entire region. Rabbi Wise was also an intimate advisor to President Roosevelt on “The Palestinian Question” and the President had promoted him

³⁶ Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 87; 121. Frederick Kohner, *Magician of Sunset Boulevard: The Improbable life of Paul Kohner, Hollywood Agent* (Palos Verdes, CA: Morgan Press, 1977), 109-113.

³⁷ Larry Langman, *Destination Hollywood: The Influence of Europeans on American Filmmaking* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 4.

as a member of the Commission for Refugees. Though frequently visiting Palestine, Rabbi Wise was based in New York where he also had his radio show and had raised various emergency funds for refugees through assorted sub-committees sometimes with the help of radio, theatrical, and motion picture people as in the Producing and Sponsoring Committee.³⁸

Eddie Cantor, a screen actor and the nation's highest paid radio actor, was also the second president of the Screen Actors Guild having served from 1933 to 1935, from the very beginning of when Hitler's anti-Jewish laws were passed in Germany's film industry. In 1936 Cantor hosted a mass meeting at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles to a thousand attendees—which surely included studio heads and refugees—on the topic of spotting fascist sympathizers titled “Hitlerism in America.” A fervent Zionist who became a future decorated supporter of the Israeli state, Cantor declared to a reporter that Rabbi Wise was “New York's best cop.”³⁹

Several local Jewish organizations lobbied for the relaxing of refugee laws, and the moral fortitude of Hollywood's Jews emanated from the more conservative Temple Israel on Hollywood Boulevard. The temple's membership list read as a who's who of the film companies' executive roster. Founded by Sol Wurtzel, Ed Laemmle, and other

³⁸ In the 1930s, eugenics was globally supported, especially among Jewish physicians in Germany. See John Glad, *Jewish Eugenics* (Washington, DC: Wooden Shore, 2010), 66; 104-107; 429. See also *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1934, 4; *Los Angeles Times*, 23 January 1938, 6; and “Roosevelt Appoints Refugees Committee,” *Palestine Post*, 2 May 1938, 1. “Night of Stars Pledges L.P. 20,000,” *Palestine Post*, 19 August 1938, 7.

³⁹ Hollywood Anti-Nazi League for the Defense of American Democracy rally at the Shrine Auditorium on October 20, 1936 hosted by radio. film star Eddie Cantor about “The Menace of Hitlerism in America.”

motion picture men, agents, and theater tycoons including its early honorary president, Louis B. Mayer, the synagogue was highly instructive in guiding those elite forces of cinema land.

The masthead of the temple's newsletter originally read, "The Voice of Hollywood's Jewry," attesting to an attempt at mustering Jews into a cohesive religious and political force. The four-page weekly newsletter reported events to inspire and interest its readership ranging from what were the countries of origin of the films shown on screens in Palestine, ancient Jewish lore, and strategies of building a state upon existing Arab lands. Increasing in frequency throughout the Thirties articles focused on legislation in America affecting refugees and news about anti-Jewish laws in Europe. However, the newsletter sometimes promoted the status quo more than anti-fascism, as one article decried a patriotic Italian being dismissed from a high-ranking Fascist Party position simply because he was Jewish.⁴⁰

In 1937, Temple Israel's president was Ben A. Englander, who besides Paul Kohner, had one of the largest actor representation firms in Hollywood with Lichtig & Englander Theatrical Agency on Hollywood Boulevard located just a block down from the temple. His presidency at the synagogue would be succeeded the following year by board member and film producer Sam Bischoff (whom Corrado had worked under in several of his films). Besides the columns dedicated in the newsletter that alarmed its readers of anti-Semitism, Temple Israel invited speakers that included the likes of Jack

⁴⁰ "Ed. Laemmle, Member of Original Board Passes Away." *The Observer*, 9 April 1937, 2.

Warner, and Hollywood Anti-Nazi League executive director Hy Kraft whose presentation titled “Beware, Fascism is on the March!” was a speech that surely focused on how anti-Jewish laws were affecting the Jewish community and how those executives in the audience were in a position to both expose any fascists that might be on their payroll, and in turn to help those refugees knocking on Hollywood’s door.

Another synagogue where Jewish Hollywood found new solidarity and power was at Wilshire Boulevard Temple. Originally known as the Congregation B’nai B’irth, the 1,800-seat Wilshire Boulevard Temple was a traditional synagogue that included many affluent motion picture men. The temple’s charismatic leader was Rabbi Edgar Magnin, who was first introduced to Hollywood’s leaders through his boyhood friend Sol Lesser, the producer of the Tarzan series. Rabbi Magnin was influential in that he would also consult on several motion pictures involving Biblical scenes such as the silent *The Ten Commandments* in which Corrado appeared.⁴¹

Wilshire Boulevard Temple employed much of the grandeur of movie palaces. The temple was ostentatious and purposely designed in the style of a movie theater complete with a stunning lobby of black and gold marble and a large bronze light fixture that was donated by Sid Grauman, the owner of Mann’s Chinese Theater. A brightly-colored mural commissioned by the Warner brothers, and created by their studio’s art director, depicted heroes of ancient Hebrew history from the Bible. At 230 feet long, it was the largest mural scheme depicted in any permanent western building, according to

⁴¹ Dianne W. Morris, *Wilshire Boulevard Temple and the Golden Age of Hollywood* (M.A. Thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 1996), 68.

one contemporary art critic in 1931. The temple stood as a remarkable cultural sentinel of Hollywood Jewish success, and was arguably the most famous temple in 1930s America. However, the lavish décor that included the aforementioned graven images, and an ark that broke with tradition by facing Hollywood instead of Jerusalem, had its detractors within Judaism. The “Million Dollar Temple” and Rabbi Magnin, known in the media as the “Rabbi of the Stars,” was actually the inspiration of a fictional book, *Rabbi Burns: A Novel* whose Jewish author satirized the gaudy temple of worship and its rabbi, who in the story left the pulpit to become the head of public relations for a large movie studio.⁴²

Corrado read Coughlin’s *Social Justice* newspaper, if he was like many Italian Americans, whose message beginning in 1938 contained anti-Semitic references and suspicion of a Jewish conspiracy that would drag America into a war with Germany. With a readership of over a million, readers would have internalized much of the message that many Jews were behind the scenes lobbying for intervention.

Some suspicions of Jews may also be traced to the Italian-American newspapers beginning in the early 1930s. Guido Orlando, a press agent that handled the press releases for many Hollywood stars as well as political figures, explained the effect that a campaign of the nation’s largest Italian language daily, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, by its editor, Generoso Pope, who he claimed was America’s most influential Italian. Along with a campaign for Italian-Americans to donate money to help build Italy’s premiere theater in Rome, Generoso Pope successfully solicited support for

⁴² Dianne W. Morris, *Wilshire Boulevard Temple and the Golden Age of Hollywood* (M.A. Thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 1996), 85-88.

a ban on *Scarface* (in which Corrado appeared in, no less). And as Orlando explained:

“Following the release of *Scarface*, which saw Paul Muni, a Jew, playing an Italian criminal, there was a great wave of feeling among Italian-Americans against the movie people.”⁴³

In Britain, Corrado would have found the situation differing little than America, with Britain’s largest film company, Gaumont British Picture Corporation, headed by a Jewish clan. The family originated in eastern Europe, and similar to the members of the Jewish banking family of Rothschild, they opened bank branches, later gaining financial control of a London outpost of a French film company that was later merged and renamed. Much like the American movie moguls, the five brothers who ran Gaumont British lived in England as barons, sporting their private boxes at the race track and keeping thoroughbreds, owning yachts, collecting cars, marrying (non-Jewish) wives—often young dancers or actresses from the studio—and all the while these brothers were cultivating rags to riches stories about themselves. Gaumont British was a filmic empire that employed over 16,000 people, ran several major production studios, owned 343 cinemas, and controlled sixty-eight subsidiaries including one that pioneered research on television. Gaumont had a large share of its stock purchased by mogul William Fox in the early 1930s in his resolution to merge it with Fox Studios, then the world’s largest (although this, along with several other transactions and the stock market crash, caused Fox’s economic demise as he did not own the controlling shares). Stinging from

⁴³ Guido Orlando and Sam Merwin. *Confessions of a Scoundrel* (Philadelphia: Winston, 1954), 54.

American competition in 1937, Britain's largest studio announced that it was reducing its staff, restructuring, and focusing on the more profitable field of exhibition, thus leaving several of its Jewish players that had fled Germany, such as Peter Lorre, to be courted by large American studios.⁴⁴

Much of the anti-Semitism during this time in the Italian community was inspired by debates in Europe where the issue dominated politics. Corrado's remark about Jews mentioned in the letter also coincides with Mussolini's Italian anti-Semitic campaign that began after Italy invaded Ethiopia. The Italian fascist anti-Jewish rhetoric was partly provoked by Jews and their campaign against the massive bombardment of non-combatants, also witnessed in the Spanish Civil War. The barrage of anti-Semitism culminated with Mussolini's *Manifesto of Italian Racism* in 1938 that inaugurated policies against Jews and Africans in Italy and in her colonies. Meant as a temporary measure, the restrictions on Jews declared that Judaism, especially after the banning of Masonry, became the chief opponent of the New Italy. One regulation in the manifesto proclaimed "Hebrewism abroad or among Italian exiles has been in some periods like 1924 and 1925 and during the Ethiopian war unanimously hostile to Fascism."⁴⁵ Benito Mussolini believed the "racial problem did not break forth suddenly as those who

⁴⁴ Nigel Ostrer, *The Ostrers and Gaumont British* (Lulu Enterprises, 2010), 106; 258; 268. The Ostrer family originated in the Polish corridor in what may be Ukraine today. Regarding his family's claim of poverty, a tale promoted in similar fashion as that of the Warner brothers or Jesse Lasky, Nigel Ostrer writes, "To me it is a theatrical embellishment on the rags-to-riches theme that would go down well at the box office if Hollywood made a movie about my family history," 36. To see how Louis B. Mayer embellished his origins story, see Ronald J. Schmidt Jr., *This is the City: Making Model Citizens in Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 30.

⁴⁵ "Italy Clamps Sweeping New Restrictions on Jews," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 1938, 1.

awakened brusquely after a long, lazy sleep may believe.” Il Duce went on to clarify “It is related to the conquest of empire.”⁴⁶

This was the ideology that caused Vittorio Mussolini to claim that the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, a communist-front organization which had campaigned against him personally, was part of a larger plot orchestrated from Moscow to overthrow what was the only new political theory in Europe: fascism. Thus his argument that “Hebrew Hollywood”—possibly the world’s most powerful Jewish population after the banking elite in New York—dominated the film industry and were outspoken enemies of fascist Italy were exaggerated yet not entirely unfounded.

Financial Struggles

The riches of the studio heads were in strong contrast to the studio blue collar workers, like bit players. Corrado complained in his letter to his uncle that he could not save money. What conditions could have made him live check to check, like so many Americans during the Depression?

While Corrado was once making \$250 a week, his pay in 1937 averaged about \$35 per film, not including his agent’s fee. Corrado’s fourteen appearances for 1936 only amounted to \$490 and it is probable that he received a little more—perhaps a hundred dollars—from his appearances as an extra. His salary for 1939 would be only \$800. Though this was a substantial amount in Depression-Era America, it paled in comparison with well-known character actors. As his parts were now small, he would have been

⁴⁶ Gene Bernardini, “The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy.” *The Journal of Modern History*, 49, no. 3 (September 1977): 445-451.

known in the industry as a “day player” because his roles usually required that he spend a day or occasionally just a few hours on the movie set, thus condemning him to a lower rate than other actors—the minimum day rate. He had gone from playing one of the musketeers alongside Fairbanks in *The Iron Mask*, to much smaller roles, sometimes quite stereotypical (even for the era) just a couple of years later. His decline was symbolized by his role as Giovanni, an Italian immigrant organ grinder in the film *Obey the Law* in 1932.

Corrado was not alone outside of filmdom to notice, perhaps with suspicion, the multitude of new foreign players around the lots of Hollywood. In the conservative South, where there were fewer immigrants among the audience, the newest invasion of American screens was obvious, if not alarming, and prompted commentary. One newspaper editor from Little Rock, Arkansas was of the opinion that the industry had purposely overlooked homegrown talent. His editorial, reprinted in *The Film Daily* for the consideration of its professional motion picture readership, was stirring: “In every town and hamlet—in every school and Little Theater are people young and old, eager to become a part of the industry. Among them are the great stars and geniuses of tomorrow. Why discourage their faith in the industry by seemingly searching only in foreign lands for star material?”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ “Critics’ Forum,” *The Film Daily*, 18 May 1937, 10. (Reprinted from an editorial by Harlan Hobbs, *Arkansas Democrat*.) Hobbs assured the readers, however, he had written the piece in “full appreciation and understanding of the Garbos, Dietrichs and others.”

Though having served a long duration in Hollywood, Corrado was in a strange position both as an actor of foreign roles and a patriotic Italian. In any case, actors of Corrado's caliber were first to notice that many roles in pictures with stories set in Europe—particularly Paris—were being provided to these recent Jewish arrivals. In fact, one small part that Corrado was just beginning to receive quite readily—that of a waiter—would get several new competitors, such as actor Sig Arno, a veteran Jewish actor of the German screen, who, unlike Corrado, would soon advance to become an assistant director in Hollywood, at least temporarily, thanks to Ernst Lubitsch, a Jewish compatriot. Corrado, a former resident of the Old World, probably brought his own biases from Europe, something quite common among immigrants. Furthermore, as Corrado became typecast as an Italian or French waiter or a barber, he may have grown resentful that he quickly became invisible in the industry.⁴⁸

Adding to this insecurity was the rising unemployment in Hollywood. Regardless of record profits in 1936 and 1937, studios implemented a slowdown, officially because colds among stars in the rainy winter months had stalled production, but also in response to union demands for higher wages in the film industry, as well as Screen Actors' Guild members participating in a Culinary Workers' Union picketing of

⁴⁸ Not all Jewish motion picture personal fit into this mold. Several actors and directors of Jewish descent chose not to publicized their Jewish heritage, such as Cecil B. DeMille, D.W. Griffith and Douglas Fairbanks. The latter two, along with Chaplin, had formed United Artists. Griffith was half Jewish and Fairbanks was the son of a Jewish lawyer from New York. DeMille preferred to follow his Christian father's religion. In contrast, Frederick Kohner describes refugee script writers from Germany at the studios as being "rarely able to make satisfactory contact with their American colleagues. They never became part of any group—except their own. At lunch they sat together and spoke German." Kohner, *Magician of Sunset Boulevard*, 111.

the Brown Derby restaurants.⁴⁹ By February of 1938, the fears of actors like Corrado, were exacted when 40 percent of motion picture workers were laid off. MGM, for instance, was completely shut down for six weeks.⁵⁰

Italians were not in the key positions in the American film industry, with only a few exceptions: actor and comedian Jimmy Durante; director Robert Vignola; cinematographer Tony Gaudio (later head of the American Cinematographers Society); financier and board member of United Artists A. H. Giannini; and celebrated director Frank Capra. By 1937, Corrado had appeared in small bit parts in Capra's *Broadway Bill* (1934) and *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), as well as Vignola's *The Girl from Scotland Yard* (1937), and had yet to work with Durante. But it was Capra's indifference towards Corrado's aspirations that the actor found particularly painful. The Sicilian had a strong influence at Columbia as the first director to have his name placed above the movie title; he was the director most associated with the studio which he helped build until forming his own independent production company; and he spent his childhood days in the "Little Italy" section of the city where Corrado had also briefly lived. Corrado was likely rejected after several casting calls for bigger roles, prompting him to always regret that despite being the one Italian that was in a position to have really helped him, "Capra did

⁴⁹ "Actors Serving in Picket Lines," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1937, 2.

⁵⁰ Nancy Lynn Schwartz, *The Hollywood Writers' Wars* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 114-115. Schwartz writes, "Claiming that the previous winter's production costs had suffered because stars caught colds and had to lay off in the midst of shooting, the producers said they were slowing down production during this rainy season to avoid unnecessary additional production costs."

nothing for me.”⁵¹

Career Possibilities in Italy

Not even in Italy did Italians have any real influence in the motion picture programming as compared to the American studios which practically controlled what movies showed on Italy's screens. But Corrado knew this could soon end if the Italians sought American technical help to become self-sufficient or if they nationalized their emerging film industry.

The young Mussolini's visit to Hollywood in 1937 made Corrado rethink his career. Vittorio Mussolini held a special rank in Italy. As head of the nation's most important film trade periodical, *Cinema*, president of a film production company in Rome, and his position as the son of the Italian dictator, he had an exalted leadership position as spokesman for the Italian film industry. He was outspoken in his criticism of the Italian motion picture productions, yet still optimistic about their potential. In a *Cinema* article entitled “In Search of the Formula,” Vittorio Mussolini wrote:

... I believe that Italian cinema industry has made another step forward. The Italian market is well supplied and it is considering “invading” the foreign market. This will be very difficult; but in time, not too far off in the future, the efficiency of Cinecittà can very well mean that some good Italian films will replace the frequent and taxing runs of American production.⁵²

⁵¹ Bill Cappello interview with Corrado.

⁵² Vittorio Mussolini, “In Cerca Della Formula,” *Cinema*, 10 February 1937, 89. Translated from Italian by the author.

By 1937, Corrado had over 150 appearances in films under his belt. Many of these films were well-known in Italy. *Anna Karenina*, where Corrado had a small part as a waiter, won the best foreign film at the Venice Film Festival in 1935. Moreover, Corrado was directed by the top directors of American cinema, which besides Capra and Griffith, included Lloyd Bacon, Clarence Brown, Michael Curtiz, Alan Dwan, George Fitzmaurice, Victor Fleming, Howard Hawks, Henry King, Ernst Lubitsch, William Cameron Menzies, and King Vidor. The latter veteran director wrote that the craft demanded that a director “must be to some extent an actor, a writer, a scene designer, a photographer, a musician, an editor, a technician, and a painter.”⁵³ Although not proficient in all, Corrado’s interests were versatile enough that he had some degree of familiarity with the jobs referenced and would have been powerfully impressive in the artistic realm with scene design, music, and painting.

Corrado was by now a two-decade veteran of the screen, and he must have thought the young Mussolini’s visit was a big opportunity which could create a big career opportunity. Just weeks before the young Mussolini’s arrival, Corrado had worked for Hal Roach Studios in *Our Gang Follies of 1938*. In this comedy short produced for MGM starring the Little Rascals, Corrado played the role of an opera singer and it is likely that he was selected by the producer who was also working with Laurel and Hardy. In fact,

⁵³ King Vidor, *A Tree s a Tree* (New York: Hartcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), 238.

promotional photographs and newsreel images captured Vittorio Mussolini touring the Roach Studios and being greeted by the Little Rascals.⁵⁴

Given all his acting experience, Corrado's résumé would have easily qualified him for a position as an assistant director in Italy. The duties of an assistant director were firstly, "making the train run on time," or in other words, insuring that the filming adhered to a schedule. As an actor, Corrado experienced many dealings with assistant directors and clearly understood how important it was to plan one's day (on-set and off) around the assistant director's attempt at keeping things orderly. Secondly, an assistant director created the film's call sheet informing actors when their parts were scheduled. The job included working with directors, actors, and casting; a job well-suited for Corrado. Better yet, the next rung up the ladder was becoming a full-fledged director.

What would have happened if Corrado had accepted the offer to go to make films in Italy? One can speculate that in a best case scenario he would have risen from the rank of assistant director to that of director. Since numerous to came out of Italy during the Fascist era, Corrado might would have flourished—particularly after the war—like Roberto Rossellini or Vittorio De Sica did in their craft. Considering all of Corrado's experience in the American cinema—the successful model Italy was emulating—it seems plausible that he would have been offered directorial work in Italy.

⁵⁴ Paystub for Gino Corrado's employment in *Our Gang Follies of 1938* for the total amount of \$35 gross earnings, dated 13 November 1937. Corrado's take home pay was \$34.33 minus \$3.56 for agent fee (\$30.77). GCC. See also "Twelve Noted Players Cast in Roach Films," *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studio News*, Rosalie Edition (undated, circa 31 December 1937), p. 3. S.S. Van Keuren was the associate producer on *Swiss Miss* and *Our Gang Follies of 1938*.

Another option, perhaps less likely in this situation: Corrado would have bypassed Rome to work in his beloved Florence, which up until the establishment of Cinecittà, vied to become a center of cinematic production with several film companies releasing on average of almost one film a year in the 1930s.⁵⁵ Several international pictures were filmed in Florence, including *Condottieri* in 1937 that would have interested Corrado, as it was directed by Luis Trekker from Austria, and the story line was about the Medici family.

Not far from Florence and near Pisa, was one of the largest location studios outside of Rome: Cinematografica Immobiliare Pisorno. In Tirrenia, near the ocean on the west coast of the peninsula, “Pisorno,” as it was called, first laid the dream of an Italian Hollywood in 1934 but was extinguished with the construction of the massive Cinecittà in Rome a few years later. In fact, actress Rosina Lawrence who saw her contract cancelled at Roach Studios and the R.A.M venture postponed indefinitely, accepted an offer to work the following year at Pisorno opposite Italy’s leading comedic duo and the closest thing to Laurel and Hardy, Eduardo and Peppino De Fellippo, with *In campagna è caduta una stella* (release title in America: *In the Country Fell a Star*) a feature film where she played an American starlet that causes romantic pretensions to flare up in the Italian countryside amongst several peasants during a feast.⁵⁶ Ironically, a

⁵⁵ At least 15 films were produced or shot in Florence during the Fascist Era, 1923-1943. In the 1930s, these included: 1933: *Acqua Cheta*; 1935: *Ginevri degli Almieri*, *Lorenzino de’ Medici*, *Maestro Landi*; 1939: *Condottieri*. See Andrea Vannini, *Firenze nel cinema* (Firenze: La Bottega del cinema, 1990), 79.

⁵⁶ Piero Mechini, “Cinecittà a Bocca D’Arno: Gli studi Pirsorno di Terrenia,” in Luca Giannelli, and Sandro Bernardi (eds.) *La Toscana e il cinema* (Florence, Italy: Casa editrice Felice Le Monnier, Firenze, per la Banca Toscana, 1994), 201-203.

reviewer in a fascist newspaper in Florence commented on how the film's theatricality was primitive and that the different dialects (in what was supposed to be the Neapolitan countryside) was distracting.⁵⁷

Florence was also experiencing a rebirth of its theater. Traveling in Vittorio Mussolini's entourage to America was Corrado Pavolini, brother of Alessandro (both brothers worked on the previously mentioned *18BL*).⁵⁸ As a playwright, producer, artist, and journalist from Florence, Corrado Pavolini may have offered Gino Corrado some work in Italy, though not as an actor. More avant garde than Vittorio Mussolini, Pavolini believed that Italy should create a distinctly Italian cinematic consciousness to compete with the foreign model of America; great actors could be found in the street, all for realism, in strict contrast to the dramaticism of the American star system.⁵⁹ Pavolini wrote stories for five films that were produced in the Fascist era and would have been in a position to help Corrado.⁶⁰

Corrado's Tuscan heritage would have been beneficial for a career in Italy. The Renaissance, rather than the Roman Empire, was actually the apex of Italian civilization according to Il Duce. Several top members of Mussolini's government were Tuscan and

⁵⁷ "Film e Variata," *Il Bargello* [Florence, Italy], 26 May 1940, 3.

⁵⁸ S.S. Rex "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers," 16 September 1937, 17.

⁵⁹ James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy: The Passing of the Rex* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1987), 11, 135. Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 73.

⁶⁰ The five films that Pavolini wrote were *Un'avventura di Salvator Rosa* (1941), *La corona di ferro* (41), *Un colpo di pistola* (1941), *Quelli della montagna* (43), and *All'ombra della Gloria* (1943). See John Stewart, *Italian Film: A Who's Who* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), 341.

reshaped Italy in Tuscan terms. Alessandro Pavolini promoted medieval and Renaissance art and founded a fair in Florence that promoted artisanal products, whereby in 1935, the fair's attendance reached 200,000 and began exporting products to other international fairs. The fascist government also promoted the everyday vernacular culture as part of a mission to construct a public history in Italy. As an artist rediscovering his roots, Corrado would have found inspiration under such conditions.⁶¹

The worst case situation then for Corrado in Italy was that he would have received training in a state-funded school in Rome (such as the famous Centro Esperimentale) and as an Italian returned from America, his name would have been publicized by the government to show that while America had stolen away Italian talent such as Isa Miranda, a starlet that appeared in *Scipione l'Africano* and had become a United States citizen—"she has become totally Americanized" according to the American news bureau release—the booming Italian film industry could call home its artists from Hollywood's film colony.⁶² Continuing with this possibility, Corrado's high-profile status and attachment to Mussolini's government would have forced him to follow Mussolini's broken empire into exile in northern Italy (known briefly as the Republic of Salò in 1943), where it would be extinguished upon Mussolini's death in 1945. In fact, though many who worked for the film industry under Mussolini survived the end of Fascism, several of its most avid adherents did not. Osvald Valent, who was married to Doris Duranti, one of

⁶¹ Medina D. Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, 80-81; 204; 258-259.

⁶² "Isa Miranda Italian Film Star Gets Citizenship Papers," Acme Newspictures" photograph, released to most major news bureaus, including Los Angeles and New York. In the author's possession.

Italy's most popular actresses, was executed along with Alessandro Pavolini, by partisans. The latter was one of those hung upside in the Milan square with Il Duce himself.

Why did Corrado never leave Hollywood for Italy? Perhaps one explanation for this is that although he had no children in 1937, he was married and settled in America, making a far-away move to join a fledgling movie industry—or one proclaiming to be reborn—seem a risky endeavor. Another concern was the possibility of working in an Italy, even for a short duration, on the brink of war. Although Corrado's uncle claimed that an assistant director and interpreter could live better in Italy than in America—and Corrado Trevisani was a credible source of information due to his frequent voyages—the higher salary during a time of international military conflict would also mean the possibility of disruptions, isolation, and shortages. But would the American film industry really be a haven from all these dangers for Corrado, especially in the face of an impending world war?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IDEOLOGIES OF THE LOT:

COMMUNISM, FASCISM, THE HOLLYWOOD ANTI-NAZI LEAGUE AND THE
BUND WAR

If Corrado wanted to avoid a war, however, it would have been almost impossible. The streets of Rome and Berlin were not the only sites of ideological battles. In what was called “the Hollywood Bund War,” Corrado would have witnessed both communist and fascist front organizations that had stationed themselves in the media capital. In fact, representatives and front organizations from Moscow, Berlin, and Rome all hoped to influence the movie content and the hearts and minds of the masses. The battles in Hollywood involved much larger debates that embroiled America’s in a war in Europe. The battle for film content was argued by consulate agents stationed in Los Angeles and New York. But the political debates took form in a battle of committees with organizations supporting the interventionists (like the popular front groups) and those supporting isolation, such as the Father Coughlin’s Christian Front and the America First Committee.

On the streets of Hollywood a battle raged, culminating in a propaganda war. The Silver Shirts, a white paramilitary group run by a charismatic leader, counted many film workers in its ranks, among them were several at MGM who actually canvassed the studio lot with leaflets. In some instances, as many as 20,000 leaflets were dropped from the tallest buildings on Hollywood Boulevard onto pedestrians (some of whom were no

doubt actors or extras) calling for an all-out boycott of the movies and claiming the “Jewish Anti-Nazi League controls Communism in the Motion Picture Industry,” and “Stars, Writers, and Artists are compelled to pay for Communistic Activities.”¹

Resistance to the perceived “Jewish dominance” emanated from the extreme right wing, that used somewhat sophisticated propaganda means to exploit dissent in Hollywood amongst its workers in its larger attempt at racializing these workers.

Motion picture workers sometimes secretly turned each other in. Democrat Senator Martin Dies of Texas, acting as the Chairman of the House of un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), explained at a hearing in Washington in 1938 about subversive propaganda, that complaints came from *within* the studios. Though some allegations were sent to him from individuals about the activities of Nazi organizations, Dies reported that “motion picture executives and employees had protested mainly about the spread of communism in the film colony.”² With the Communist Party actively recruiting in Hollywood since the early thirties, there were about 200 party members in the motion picture industry by 1935, including many members of Corrado’s Screen Actors Guild.³

¹ University of Southern California, Special Collections, Joseph Roos Papers, Box 9, “Research” file. Flyer. Also see undated clipping from *Jewish Journal*. See also Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 195-196.

² “Dies Committee Will Move Hearing to Pacific Coast,” *Los Angeles Times* 9 October 1938, 4.

³ Samantha Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood: A Biography of Louella Parsons* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 174-175. This was also true of the late 1940s and 1950s with the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals who called on the House on Un-American Activities Committee to investigate if communists were inserting propaganda into movies. See “Marcia

Several writers and film workers belonged to the Silver Legion and it was this group, along with the German-American Bund, that exploited dissent amongst the studio workers about the issues of its Jewish management, the mandate of employees paying dues or donations to support Refugee emigration, and its Communist Party affiliations. Joseph Roos, who supplied research for the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, later wrote that it was “the German-American Bund that made the first attempt to equate Jewish involvement in Hollywood with communism in the motion picture industry.”⁴ However, the campaign against Jews and communism, later referred to in some trade papers as the Hollywood Bund War, originated with business competition between two theaters in Los Angeles. The Continental Theatre, owned by a leader of the Bund, showed strictly German-language films, usually un-subtitled, while its rival movie house, the much larger 900-seat aptly named Grand International Theatre, showed mostly subtitled Russian and French movies but carried occasional subtitled movies imported from Germany and Italy.

Perhaps the most agitating force of Hollywood actors, at least according to the informants of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, came from a few of the local radio stations and one particular individual radio commentator G. Allison Phelps. Phelps later explained in a published letter how he “had the temerity to publicly criticize some of the top motion picture industrialists for their un-American, Communistic

Hunt by Glen Lovell,” in Patrick Milligan and Paul Buhle (eds.). *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 314.

⁴Herb Brin, “Exhibit Documents Propaganda Efforts of Southland Nazis,” *Heritage Publications*, 12 January 1990, D. Clipping in the Joseph Roos Collection, Box 9, folder “Research—Misc.”

propaganda...[and]... publicly opposed those who were engaged in the un American business of importing so-called ‘refugees’ and discharging American citizens from their positions to make room for aliens.”⁵ Corrado had the opportunity to listen—and likely did—to the popular Phelps on stations KMTR and later KMPC, airing between 1 and 2pm four days a week broadcasting from Phelps’s home (in what is now Los Feliz and a few blocks from Corrado’s brother’s house).

Phelps as an author was largely unknown to the general public despite his poetry books and magazines. However, he was more than a competent writer and he eventually published an array of pamphlets on the subject of Hollywood making him known in the industry. Perhaps his most articulate writing that surely would have received some attention was a 32-page booklet titled *An American’s History of Hollywood: The Tower of Babel*. Self-published in 1940, the booklet was adorned with “Attention! Sam Goldwyn” on the reverse. Well-written and bombastic though propagandistic, this latter publication reported the moguls’ salaries and alleged secret terror tactics. In fact, an insider may have informed Phelps as he had a multitude of associates—some of which were his filmland neighbors—that were not above breaking into the confidential personnel files kept within Hollywood’s studio offices.⁶

⁵ “A Letter from ‘G. Allison’ Phelps,” 2-3. Inventory of the California Un-American Activities Committee Records, Box 27, Folder 12.3. California State Archives, Sacramento, CA.

⁶ Anne Richardson, “Rhonda Vista in the Thirties and Forties: How Radio Walk Got its Name,” *Overview* (Franklin Hills Association newsletter) No. 36; Fall/Winter 2008: 13. Phelps lived at 2301 Rhonda Vista and his neighbor was director Johnny Hines. According to an American Legion report, Phelps collaborated with director Russell Mack (who had visited Germany in 1939) to denounce Hollywood. See Subversive Activities in America First Committee in California report no. 1, page 3. See also Louis Pizzitola, *Hearst Over Hollywood* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2002): 388.

Actors that read the pamphlet could have easily believed Phelps's claim that moguls from rival studios often secretly met together behind closed doors to discuss issues within the industry, and this included maintaining a blacklist. Phelps wrote: "The preferred list of those to be rewarded with fat contracts is prepared, the names drawn from those with blood relationship, or with political contracts which promise to strengthen the Dynasty of the Tower of Babel." However, those actors who were uncooperative, hard to handle, tied to a flop picture, or on the receiving end of a personal grudge, would be placed on a list that recorded drunkenness, prostitution, suicide and other crimes. A few names, Phelps noted, would denote that a blacklist was active against the person's politics, such as that of director Howard Hawks and actor Francis X. Bushman. In one photograph of Corrado posed at work with Hawks on-set, Corrado seems to be gazing admirably at the "Grey Fox" as if they were old chums—perhaps attesting to a common understanding in terms of political orientation.

Francis X. Bushman met with Benito Mussolini in Rome in 1927 and was a vocal admirer of Il Duce, as well as an outspoken member of the America First Committee. As a superstar actor in the early 1920s, by the 1930s Bushman was acting in bit and extra roles alongside Corrado. Bushman possibly was passed up for a few roles because of his political beliefs such as his support of America First. Quite possibly, his career declined with his age and the difficulties in transitioning to sound. Though the America First organization sent Italian representatives into Italian neighborhoods, it is doubtful that Corrado would have officially joined the organization, but the group counted several other Hollywood actors. Bushman (one of the most prominent) claimed

that he was “crucified” for speaking out against America joining the war in Europe. In a personal letter written by Bushman to another silent film old-timer, Lillian Gish, he commended her as an “American actress” for doing what he had also done in daring “to speak the truth” and complimented her outspokenness against the pro-war forces (Britain, the Jews, and the Roosevelt administration according to the official America First Committee platform). Comparing Gish to that of the America First leader and aviation hero Colonel Charles Lindberg, Bushman assured her: “Since more than eighty per cent of Americans are opposed to our fighting England’s latest WAR, I am sure, a National Shrine will in days to come, be erected to you.” Attesting to his political involvement, in this same letter, Bushman claimed that he wrote several senators to protest the war. He likely felt himself surrounded by enemies of his cause, specifically the refugees, as many that had been accomplished in Europe had recently come en masse to settle in the ritzy Pacific Palisades, the very community where he resided.⁷

Corrado may have made the decision to whole-heartedly become an interventionist, though this is unlikely. Quite possibly, he felt coerced to accept roles that would have been otherwise objectionable if Hollywood was not so politically polarized about war. It may be the powerless situation of a bit player such as Corrado’s that he could not reject any work sent his way for fear of losing roles to other actors, or he

⁷ Letter dated 27 April 1941 from Francis X. Bushman to Lillian Gish. Lillian Gish Papers; Box 1, “Correspondence”; Folder: Bushman, Francis X. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. For information on Francis X. Bushman’s meeting with Mussolini, his membership in America First, and Italian Americans and America First, see John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 243, 345-346.

worried about publicizing his political views, something that was already a problem. Also possible, he may not have known exactly what the script was in its entirety as he was given just a few pages. This might be the case when he worked on the CBS radio show *Miss Brown*. A benefit for the Motion Picture Relief Fund, we can assume Corrado was unpaid, the high-profile Sunday prime time musical comedy was directed by Ernst Lubitsch and written by Aurthur Sheekman—the latter Hollywood Anti-Nazi League member was listed as an “objectional person” and communist radical according to one local fascist group.⁸ Starring George Murphy, Loretta Young, Fred Astaire, and Herbert Marshall, Corrado was credited and played an Italian-accented concert manager of the Sky Room in the Astoria Hotel. The propagandist and overtly interventionist radio play was about “noble Britain,” a love triangle story where one of the male leads is sent to Europe as his fleet is mobilized for war.

“I’m sailing on the Queen Mary at midnight.”

“Is it war?” asks the character played by Loretta Young.

“Lord only knows.”

“With a man like that on your side you can’t lose,” says Fred Astaire’s character.

“England can’t lose, but we can Jerry. We may never see him again.”

A complete contrast to the Anglophilia was Father Coughlin’s radio show and newspaper, *Social Justice*, which often portrayed the British Empire as treacherous. In a

⁸ Report (from the Silver Shirts?) titled ‘List of Objectional People’ in the Motion Picture Industry, Drawn by Cyril Shishmareff, Son of Mrs. Leslie Fry.” Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, Community Relations Committee Collection, Part 2; Box 81;07. California State University Northridge, Special Collections and Archives.

manifesto, Coughlin appealed to Irish-Americans, and reminded them of their struggles since 1772 when they were “robbed, starved, exiled, shot, bayoneted, and hanged by the British because they loved their faith and their liberty.” Coughlin was sympathetic to Mussolini and the fascist corporate state. Italian Americans were prompted to reject intervention as Britain had double-crossed the Italians after the Treaty of Versailles when Italy was not awarded territory as promised—a political maneuver that created strikes and disunity, an atmosphere that gave rise to the Italian fascists.⁹ “Why [did] this country jump in all the time to help England and France everytime they are in trouble?,” Corrado asked in a later interview, echoing an anti-interventionist sentiment espoused in *Social Justice*.¹⁰

The Italian-language press in the United States promoted the idea of territorial expansion. At the beginning of Mussolini’s rise as dictator, *Il Carroccio* (published in New York) translated an article in 1923 by Francesco Coppola, a prominent Italian writer and editor of *Il Politica*. According to Coppola, empire was a matter of survival and the Italian nation was at the crossroads. “She is, in short, faced with this major dilemma; either she must conquer a position for herself proportionate to her needs and the possessions of the others, which implies colonies which can offer suitable land to her children and proper raw materials to her industries; or else she must forever renounce her

⁹ Harold Lavine, and James A. Wechsler. *War Propaganda and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 134. See also Donald I. Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 109-113.

¹⁰ Bill Cappello interview with Gino Corrado, tape 1.

position as a great power, even as an independent power, and thus subject herself to continued emigration and a subordinate international status.”¹¹

According to anti-fascist organizations in America, the real threat of Italian fascism emanated from Il Duce’s economic power. In the Italian fascist corporate state, economics were left in private hands, with state assistance and intervention only a last resort in the case of blatant incompetency or inability to compete in the marketplace. Along with the consulates and language schools, the steamship operators, importers, and ethnic banks played a vital role in linking Italians with their homeland and giving these ethnic transplants a sense of pride. Corrado’s father and uncle, having been padroni at one time, had profited from steamships that brought boatloads of immigrants from the boot of Italy; Corrado’s other family members back in Florence were tied to ethnic Italian banks and American imports.¹²

The Italian Chamber of Commerce branch in Chicago of which Corrado’s uncle was a member was of great importance to Italy’s economic well-being in America. The chamber served as a lobby to promote the importation of Italian products, as well as to protect the businesses of Italians in the States and was partly funded by the Italian government. As America’s second largest manufacturing center at the terminus of 40 railway lines, Chicago led the world in many industries, including furniture

¹¹ Francesco Coppola, “Italy in the Mediterranean,” *Il Carroccio (The Italian Review)* 18 (1923), 226.

¹² Gaetano Salvemini and Philip V. Cannistraro, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1977), 73. Paul Einzig, *The Economic Foundations of Fascism* (London: McMillan, 1933), 84.

manufacturing and food products. In fact, virtually all individuals that were elected president of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Chicago during its early history, if not bankers, were tied to the two aforementioned industries. Dependent upon Italy's stability were merchants like Corrado's uncle who was a longtime member of the Italian Chamber of Commerce upon entering the antiques business in 1913. His Italian Antique Galleries—located on Michigan Avenue's "Magnificent Mile" across from the opulent Drake Hotel—routinely advertised in the *Directory of Italian-Americans in Commerce and Professions*, a local guide to Italian businesses.¹³

The Italian Chamber of Commerce in Chicago had many diplomatic duties, and although Chicago's Italians numbered less than ten percent of Chicago's population in 1937 (just under 300,000 of the city's 3.3 million), they yielded power as a prominent fixture in Chicago business, with the chamber sporting an elite address at 400 S. Michigan Avenue. Besides assisting members regarding customs and railway companies and listing Chicago firms that might buy Italian articles, the organization routinely hosted Italy's ambassadors, honored its consuls and helped contribute to paying off Italy's war loans.¹⁴ At the very first international meeting of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Rome, Mussolini noted that the large and enthusiastic American contingent—Chicago

¹³ *Directory of Italian-Americans in Commerce and Professions* (Chicago: Continental Press, 1937), 82. Trevisani is the only Italian listed in the Antiques section.

¹⁴ "New Members," *Chicago Italian Chamber of Commerce*, Vol. VI, No. 5 (May 1913), 8. Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey, Box 26, I. Attitudes. Listed as new member is C. Trevisani located at 106 Canal Street.

forming a large proportion—was key to Italian economic success.¹⁵ So connected to the policies of the new Italy was the Chicago branch of the Italian Chamber of Commerce, that its president, Marco Androgne, was branded a leading fascist by an unknown communist group in 1932 and sent a bomb capable of heavy damage, though it failed to detonate. Another identified target who was sent a bomb in the same incident was the editor of Chicago's *l'Italia* newspaper, who later publicly blamed communists—presumably anti-fascist Italians—from Paterson, New Jersey for the attack. Androgne claimed his chief interest was America but reminded his readers: “A majority of Chicago Italians believe in Fascism because they believe Italy is better under its rule.”¹⁶

Corrado's family was largely pro-Italian and an individual's membership in the patriotic Italian societies often overlapped. All the memberships of Corrado's extended family are difficult to establish, but what is known is that Corrado Vaselli, who was a cousin to Corrado, and the nephew of Corrado Trevisani (Gino Corrado's uncle), was very active in the Italy-America Society as well as the Firenze Society, the former being a powerful lobby group, the latter a cultural association of Florentine ex-pats. Vaselli who lived in Chicago with Corrado Trevisani and wife after leaving Florence in 1924, was pursuing a career in opera singing and often sang at the ceremonies at the festivities of Italian fraternal organizations and at events.

¹⁵ “America Shares Honors at Rome with Mussolini,” *Chicago Daily News*, 19 March 1923, 18.

¹⁶ “Italian Leaders Blame Reds for Bomb Packages,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 January 1932, 2.



Figure 8. Corrado Vaselli, Opera Tenor. Photograph taken by A. Ziffer, Florence, Italy, February 1937. Inscribed to his cousin, Gino Corrado Liserani.

Corrado's brother Luigi was also involved in the Ex-Combattanti, a veterans group that included Italian-Americans that fought in Europe, and it is likely that Gino Corrado was a member of the Dante Alighieri organization as was his other brother, Lawrence, who had moved to Los Angeles along with his parents. (Little is known of Lawrence Liserani, other than he was residing in Beverly Hills and listed yearly in the telephone directory as an actor, though it was likely he supplemented his income as an extra.)¹⁷

¹⁷ The Beverly Hills Telephone Directory lists "Lorenzo" Liserani as living with his wife Ida Leah Liserani and working at a restaurant on Wilshire Boulevard from 1930-1932. No occupation is given in 1933 and

Gino Corrado's brother Louis, or "Luigi," was a member of the Los Angeles branch of the Dante Alighieri Society, and the group routinely held recitals and plays. The group was led by two Italian professors from the University of California Los Angeles and held the Society's meetings at the university's opulent off-campus Clark Library. The group's inaugural meeting at this location in 1937 included a presentation on Italian novelist and dramatist Luigi Pirandello who had recently passed away.¹⁸ A famous figure who won the Nobel Prize for literature and melted his medal for scrap to show public support for Mussolini's war effort in Africa, Pirandello was better known in Hollywood for writing several novels and scripts, including a few adapted in English in America such as *As You Desire Me* (1932) which starred Greta Garbo and was directed by George Fitzmaurice. During the First World War, the Dante Alighieri Society had raised money for the Italian Red Cross Society and Italian war widows and orphans. More than other branches of the organization, the Los Angeles Dante Alighieri Society featured many prominent artists from the film colony. In one Italian comedy staged in 1920 called *Love in Time of War*, a benefit for the Italian Aid Committee, new arrivals Frank Puglia and Tina Modotti were featured. As a player from the Italian cinema, the play was Modotti's largest Los Angeles appearance before leaving to work in the Mexican film industry (after refusing to be typecast in Hollywood).¹⁹

¹³4, until 1935, when "Lawrence" Liserani is mentioned as an actor. Other than in 1938 when no occupation is given, he was listed consistently as an actor well into the late 1950s.

¹⁸ Charles Speroni, "The Los Angeles Chapter of the Dante Alighieri Society," 1-2. Box 2, Charles Speroni Collection, Special Collections Library, University of California Los Angeles.

¹⁹ "Italian Comedy is Played at Benefit," *Los Angeles Times* 25 April 1920, III 16.

Dante Alighieri Society branches in America were mostly comprised of American citizens of Italian ancestry, but was funded by the Italian government to promote Italian language and culture. Thus the organization became one of the chief vehicles for the dissemination of fascist propaganda in the United States. For instance, one booklet, originally published in Rome and translated for distribution to English-speaking lands by the Dante Alighieri Society defended the Ethiopian colonial expedition as a war of peace and civic progress, arguing that after the fleeing of Emperor Haile Selassie, who was “the accomplice and profiteer of the slave trade,” the Italian troops were greeted as liberators by the Africans—with as many as two million people, or one-sixth of the population, having been held in bondage. Besides abolishing slavery (a claim bolstered by photos of Italian soldiers removing shackles from the legs of Africans), the Italian conquerors improved sanitary conditions and built schools. The booklet also detailed that in order to expand inland trade, “over five thousand kilometers of roads have been rapidly built and conditioned by the soldiers and the hundred thousand Italian workmen in East Africa, who have thus shown themselves to be worthy heirs of the great Roman tradition.”²⁰

In Chicago, the local branch of the Dante Alighieri Society organized official functions such as a reception of Italo Balbo—an Italian aviation hero and later governor

²⁰ *Roman Peace and Civil Progress in Redeemed Ethiopia* (Rome: The Dante Alighieri Society [Società nazionale Dante Alighieri], 1936), 6; 36. The opening page begins with a quote from Mussolini mentioning abolition, “the most wretched are freed from age-long slavery,” as proof that the “sword of Rom[an] civilisation triumphs over barbarism.” (page 3) Interestingly, ancient Rome was a slave society eventually brought down by barbarian invaders. The rough estimate of slaves to free men (1:6) prior to the “liberation” by Italy appears on the last page, 38.

of Italy's northern Africa territory—at the Drake Hotel during the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition which included a guest list of Chicago's leading citizens anxious to meet the famed flyer. Corrado's uncle was surely one of the hundreds of thousands in attendance as the aviator and his compatriots were chauffeured up Michigan Avenue just prior to their return flight. A Roman reporter noticed that ninety percent of the Italians in the throngs were from southern Italy, prompting the comment that they were more patriotic than their northern counterparts.²¹

In 1937, the president of the Chicago branch of the Dante Alighieri Society was Mario Palmieri, a former officer of the Italian navy. Palmieri also published, under the auspices of the Chicago organization, a 250-page book titled *The Philosophy of Fascism* which laid the foundations of the ideology with the poet Dante as a precursor to modern Italy, as he was “the apostle of those ideas and those beliefs which have become articles of faith of the Fascist creed, and, in particular, of the concept of Empire which plays one of the leading roles in the Fascist philosophy of life.”²² In a passage about the concept of nation which decries America's lack of a “living unity with one purpose, one ideal, one duty” Palmieri wrote:

Before being terrorized thus by the changes involved into the acceptance of the principles of Fascism, let us get rid of our baseless fear, because it might happen that Fascism—as a philosophy and way of life—may be the only

²¹ “Society Agog over Prospect of Welcoming Balbo, Italian Airman,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* 18 December 1932, G1. “Balbo Flyers Take Off for east at Dawn,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* 19 July 1933, 1.

²² Palmeiro's book received the blessing of the President of the Dante Alighieri Society in Rome. An order form for the book sent from Palmieri to Rino Lanzoni of the Cuacolo Club in San Francisco says it was printed as 1000 copies for \$2; 100 copies in “bound in cloth and vellum” for \$10; and a limited ten copies on handmade paper, ‘niger,’ and inscribed by the author for \$50.

remedy for our incurable ills and evils. If we want to be true to ourselves we must begin to confess those things which form the true core of Fascism we are sorely deficient and direly in need. We are in need, in other words, of unselfish love, respect for other beings, consideration for poverty, recognition of authority, admiration of old age, attachment to the hearth, love for the soil, passion for art, devotion to ideals, sacrifices for the common weal; of all things, finally, which are born of the Soul and partake of the Spirit. Fascism—in its purest and truest expression—is nothing more than what we have not and what, instead, we should have with us if we want to retain any aspiration of a truly civilized nation.²³

The Los Angeles branch of the Dante Alighieri Society was similarly pro-Italian and pro-fascist. Active in leadership in the early days of the organization was the Marchetti family which began with Carlo Marchetti, whose advocacy soon passed on to his sons, Roger and Joseph, their two other siblings, spouses, and children. Roger, the oldest son, was born in Florence, and Joseph born in Memphis. Both boys moved with their parents to Chicago and in 1905 settled in Los Angeles. They both became attorneys that represented many clients from the film industry. In 1936, Roger had compiled a 476-page book of case history that became the seminal guide on rulings and legislation pertaining to copyright, intellectual property, defamation, and censorship in the entertainment industry.²⁴ Roger represented several prominent actors including Jackie Oakie (ironically, an actor that would later play Mussolini on-screen) and was known for handling the frequent divorce suits in Cinemaland. In fact, during the young Vittorio Mussolini's visit he was handling the divorce proceedings of comedian Stan Laurel (of

²³ Mario Palmieri, *The Philosophy of Fascism* (Chicago: The Dante Alighieri Society, 1936), 220; 231.

²⁴ Roger Marchetti. *Law of the Stage, Screen and Radio, Including Authors' Literary Property and Copyright in Drama, Music, Photoplays and Radio Script; the Press and the Radio; Censorship of Films; Defamation Through Screen or Radio; Broadcasting Drama* (San Francisco: Suttonhouse, 1936).

Laurel and Hardy), and perhaps in an early example of collaborative law, that of his wife.²⁵ Roger, who had served in the First World War attaining the rank of Major, was also the legal counsel of the International Artists Club (which had entertained Corrado as a guest of honor, as previously mentioned). He also was an avid yachtsman, and at the height of Mussolini's popularity christened his new streamlined twenty-five foot racing yacht, "Il Duce."²⁶

Contrary to his younger divorce attorney brother—or perhaps in tandem—Joseph Marchetti often presided as a judge in the ceremonies of many filmdom marriages. He was elected to a Los Angeles municipal judge seat, largely due to his campaigning among the Italian voters of Los Angeles. Upon his return from a visit of Italy in 1932 after meeting with Benito Mussolini, his supportive public statements trumpeted Italy's high morale, lack of crime, and non-political judicial system (where judges were appointed, not elected). The latter statement made him a primary target of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League who sought to oust the incumbent in an election in early 1941 by connecting Marchetti to Il Duce and painting the judge as an enemy of democracy.²⁷

The elite Liseranis and Marchettis seemed to run in the same circles. Carlo Marchetti certainly knew Corrado's father, Carlo Liserani. In a 1908 *Los Angeles Times* feature, the elder Marchetti was referred to as the leader of the Italian colony in Los

²⁵ Louvish, *Stan and Ollie: The Roots of Comedy*, 357.

²⁶ C.H.S., "Notes and Comments," *The Catalina Islander*, 30 April. 1930, 6.

²⁷ Los Angeles League for the Preservation of Democracy, Flier, circa 1941. "Defend Democracy-Defeat Fascist Favorite Judge Marchetti—Elect John E. "Jack" Dalton. In the author's collection.

Angeles. Marchetti had played a big part in the planning of the Venice neighborhood as an art and architecture consultant.²⁸ The son of a famous painter, Florence-born Marchetti had been a representative of Italy in several world's fairs beginning with the 1889 Paris Exposition. He was the commissioner-general for Italy in the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, and while living in the Windy City he singlehandedly successfully petitioned the Italian government to create an exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair where at the fairgrounds he also ran an Italian restaurant. That these two men would not have known each other is impossible especially considering that both were representatives of art and sculpture at world's fairs, with marble in particular as part of their expertise. Also strangely possible is that the Italian government picked Carlo Marchetti, who had a father that was a well-known painter, had a distant relative directly related to Christopher Columbus, had exemplary army service, and experience as a municipal politician, over that of Carlo Liserani, as the chief director or representative for virtually all of Italy's fair exhibits in the years 1889 up to 1915, including San Francisco and San Diego.²⁹

Another son of Carlo was Milo Marchetti, and was less prominent in the society pages as his brothers Joseph and Roger. Milo, however, was like Corrado's brother Luigi in his involvement in the catering industry. He helped run a restaurant with his father, Marchetti's on Wilshire Boulevard, that served movie folk, and he later personally

²⁸ Mariann Gatto, *Los Angeles's Little Italy*, 61.

²⁹ "Big Mission of Marchetti," *Los Angeles Times* 2 November 1908, p. I11. See also "Commissioner off to Europe: Envoy Will Secure Exhibits for Exhibition," *Los Angeles Times* 10 May 1914, II8. For information regarding Marchetti's café at the St. Louis World's Fair, see "Dagger of Fist?: Doge of Venice Declares War on Italy and Says Blood must be Spilled," *Los Angeles Times* 29 August 1905, II1. For Marchetti's genealogy see "Obituary," *Chicago Tribune* 3 October 1937, 22.

supervised the catering department at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel.³⁰ As an amateur golf champion he probably made filmland connections on the golf course. Around 1936 he had set up a small talent agency in Hollywood, though there is no evidence that it specifically represented Corrado or other Italians.³¹ However, under the auspices of the Eleanora Duse Club, a Fascist-funded cultural society similar to the Dante Alighieri, Corrado directed Roger Marchetti's sister in an Italian language play (*Il maniaco per la Donne*) in 1929.³²

A later Hollywood Anti-Nazi League leaflet made mention of Vittorio Mussolini's sightseeing of Los Angeles that may have included both the Liserani brothers in his entourage, and singled out Joseph Marchetti's role. The leaflet read in part: "it was Judge Marchetti and his attorney brother who proudly led the featherless princip, this knight without spurs who had boosted [sic] of his sadistic bombings on peaceful Ethiopian villagers, on a tour of the Hollywood night spots."³³ One can imagine that with Corrado and his brother who knew countless actors and directors, and the Marchettis who were also knowledgeable of sensitive personal and financial information of filmland, the

³⁰ "New of the Cafes," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 June 1934, A8. See also "News of the Cafes," 31 January 1934, A8. Marchetti's, "one of the more popular restaurants of the city," was originally at Fifth and Western and served Franco-Italian food. The restaurant moved to Wilshire and Reeves in 1934 and branched out beyond ethnic food. See also "News of the Cafes," *Los Angeles Times* 5 January 1934, A8 for information on the opening.

³¹ In 1955 Milo followed his brothers and became a lawyer. See "Judge's Kin to be Admitted to State Bar," *Los Angeles Times* 17 June 1955, 2.

³² Program for Eleanora Duse presents *Il Maniaco per le Donne* at the Catholic Women's Club, 5 March 1929 (Gino Corrado, Director). GCC.

³³ Ibid, 2.

young Mussolini probably received a behind the scenes tour like no other. The Marchettis may have been interrupted in their boosterism of Los Angeles, however, when their father grew ill; and on October 3 Carlo Marchetti passed away, while Mussolini was still in Los Angeles.³⁴

The Liseranis were connected to another Florentine family—the elite Allegretti’s of Los Angeles. After the passing away of uncle Trevisani’s wife, Emma Bontag Trevisani, aboard the *Rex* while on return to America from a buying trip in Italy, Corrado’s uncle apparently became distraught after the death of his companion of over forty years and went on a self-destructive binge. News of his getting into trouble quickly reached Corrado in Los Angeles via the Allegretti family, as it was an Allegretti—probably one with connections—who was rumored to have helped him. Corrado’s uncle admitted to his nephew that his own behavior “was beginning to tell on me, I was beginning to drink quite heavily, kept late hours, and done lot of things I shouldn’t have done.” However, he denied breaking any laws: “About the Allegretti getting me out of several messes with women in Chicago it’s a damn lie as never in my life [have] I ever got mixed up in any trouble of this kind. And if I had been a gambler I would never be in the position that I am today and this is the answer.”³⁵

³⁴ “Life Closes: Death Takes Carlo Marchetti Co-Founder of Venice and Father of City Judge Succumbs,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 October 1937, 1.

³⁵ Letter, dated 2 October 1937, on Italian Antiques Gallery, from Corrado Trevisani (Gino Corrado’s uncle) to Gino Corrado Liserani. GCC.

As there were several Allegretti's in Chicago and Los Angeles, almost all being related, it is hard to distinguish to which uncle Corrado Trevisani was referring.

Corrado's contact in Los Angeles may have been Joe Allegretti at 1123 Edgemont, a few blocks from both his and his brother's old neighborhood of Los Feliz.³⁶ As Trevisani sold high-end Italian antiques only affordable to the wealthiest of clients, one could assume that he meant Judge Francis Allegretti, a powerful Chicago municipal judge with relatives in Los Angeles. But also possible are several other Allegrettis who were gangsters, such as convicted criminal Bon Bon Allegretti, named so because of his candy-making industrialist father (who was a founding member of the Italian Chamber), or another Allegretti, a member of Al Capone's gang—the Neapolitan Capone himself was a well-known collector of antiques, as portrayed in several scenes of the movie *Scarface*.

For actors of Corrado's stature, competition was fierce, especially in the 1930s. With the German victories and establishment of the Vichy government in France, many affluent Jewish film personnel fled to the unoccupied zone in Nice. After the fall of Paris in 1940, the German government enacted several ordinances that effectively banned films made or distributed by Jews, thus sending more actors (mostly leads) to Hollywood—and several directors that Corrado would work under.³⁷ Corrado later said, "One day I play a

³⁶ Joe A. Allegretti was thirty years old, near Corrado's brother's old place on Edgemont (not far from the Derby). *Van Nuys News* 11 September 1939, 2.

³⁷ Evelyn Ehrlich, *Cinema of Paradox: French Filmmaking Under the German Occupation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 57-58.

lead—the next day a small part. I even did extra work when things were bad.”³⁸

More surprising are the several bit roles that Corrado accepted that could have gotten him blacklisted in fascist Italy—astonishing if one considers that he was thinking of going to Italy to work with Il Duce’s son just a few short years earlier. If there is any comparison, the Nazi German reaction towards actors that collaborated with Jewish anti-Nazi producers was unforgiving. Prior to the Americans entering the war, Warner Brothers announced the commencement of a film version of Leon G. Terrou’s *Nazi Spies in America*, to be titled *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*. The German consulate in Los Angeles vehemently protested and after demanding that Hollywood’s censor, Joseph Breen, inform the consul of all production updates regarding the production. The German consul promised a campaign against the film of sabotage that was ordered by Hitler himself. Technicians and actors with family members in Germany feared reprisals and Warner Brothers initially considered running the film without any credits but compromised with inserting them at the end. Martin Kosleck, a Russian-born Jewish actor and outspoken anti-Nazi who fled Germany (and was on an undesirables list), must have been particularly alarmed at the threat, because though his role was small, he played Joseph Goebbels, Germany’s Propaganda Minister, a most noticeable part to any German sympathizers.³⁹

³⁸ Bill Cappello interview with Gino Corrado. Van Nuys, CA, 4 May 1976. Tape 1.

³⁹ Michael E. Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Bros.’s Campaign Against Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 73. See also Hal Wallis and Charles Higham, *Starmaker: The Autobiography of Hal B. Wallis* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 79; Douglas V. Churchill, “Espionage in Hollywood,” *New York Times*, 5 February 1939, sec. 9, page 5; Christine Ann Colgan, “Warner Brothers’ Crusade Against the

Corrado, in fact, appeared in two of the most influential propaganda pictures widely exhibited in America prior to entering the war: *The Great Dictator* (1940) and *Foreign Correspondent* (1940). Both films were banned in Italy. *The Great Dictator* starred Charlie Chaplin lampooning Hitler and actor Jackie Oakie spoofing Mussolini and the movie marked the decline of Il Duce's image on screen. Previously known as articulate and intelligent, Mussolini was now portrayed as the bald buffoon in movies thereafter. Corrado appeared as a sculptor in *The Great Dictator* and went on to work in several of America's best World War II propaganda films. If Corrado had any affiliations with Mussolini and fascist Italy, they apparently vanished once America's involvement in the war became imminent.

Gino Corrado would support America and democracy—at least outwardly—but one wonders what influenced him after a careful consideration of his options. The high profile of actors left them particularly vulnerable to political repercussions. "I was a victim of discrimination during the war," Corrado would assert throughout his life. He often described being denied roles by directors and casting agents:

Every time I'd go for the interview: "Oh, Corrado? We don't want Corrado! We don't want *him*!" They wouldn't give me the job. What the hell did *I* have to do with Mussolini's politics?⁴⁰

Thus his work with Mussolini's son indeed affected his career. Corrado believed newsreel footage of him with Vittorio Mussolini, a few flattering quotes he gave

Third Reich: A Study of Anti-Nazi Activism and Film Production, 1933-1941" (PhD Diss., University of Southern California, 1985), 324-325.

⁴⁰ Gino Corrado interview with Bill Cappello, 4 May 1976, tape 1.

the press while awaiting the young Mussolini's arrival in Los Angeles, and the *Times* front page spread of his uniformed brother greeting Mussolini at the airport, circulated amongst communists—mainly Jews—in Hollywood who blacklisted him with whatever means at their disposal. After all, he later claimed, “the Jews had the cameras there.”⁴¹

Corrado was likely influenced by Silver Shirt and German Bund propaganda that targeted Hollywood's working actors and linked Jews to a wider communist conspiracy. A report that listed a large portion of the two-hundred-and-fifty stars (leading players) with their Jewish affiliations—through birth or marriage—was meant to prove that the industry was essentially Jewish-run. Thirty of the top producers and studio heads of Jewish heritage were named as having maintained an absolute dictatorship and a hidden hand that frequently ruined the careers of actors, extras, and other movie workers. When a producer's edict was carried out, actors simply did not work again with no explanation. The report, written for movie workers and probably read by Corrado, could have easily played off the fears of any actor who repeatedly suffered rejection for big parts. The top agents garnered salaries comparable to the movie moguls and usually more than any of their clients such as with the most successful agent, Myron Selznick, who earned somewhere around \$250,000 a year in his personal salary and agency profits.⁴² According to the report, the agents were almost all Jewish and biased against non-Jews. (The Orsatti brothers, Frank and Victor, who were Italian-Americans, were listed as Jews,

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Tom Kemper, *Hidden Talent: The Emergence of Hollywood Agents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 146-147.

either erroneously or because of Zeppo Marx's partnership in their firm.) Talent agencies such as Goetz, Goldstein and Blumenthal; Nat C. Goldstone; Abraham Lehr; Myron Selznick, and others were a cartel that constantly colluded in "secret agreement with the producers."⁴³

Several agencies openly displayed partiality for Jewish actors in the films they casted. The appearance of bias was not helped by the European Film Fund, an organization that provided welfare, passage, and guaranteed movie jobs for Jews in Europe through the urging of donations from film workers like Corrado. The European Film Fund was actually headquartered inside a casting agency—that of Paul Kohner on Sunset Boulevard. Paradoxically possible, Corrado went to the Kohner casting office to inquire about representation or a role in a specific movie; he was rejected but not before having been solicited for a contribution to help displaced actors from Germany immigrate to Hollywood.⁴⁴ Zeppo Marx, the fourth Marx brother, never worked in front of the camera after *Duck Soup* but owned one of the larger agencies in Hollywood. An active member of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, Marx was described as "one the biggest communists in Hollywood" by Corrado in a later interview. The comment may have been given because of Corrado's belief that his acting career suffered because of Marx's and

⁴³ Report (from the Silver Shirts?) titled "Motion Picture Producers," 1-4. Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, Community Relations Committee Collection, Part 2; Box 81;07. California State University Northridge, Special Collections and Archives. For more information on Orsatti's partnership, see Axel Madsen, *Stanwyck* (San Jose: IUniverse.com, 2001), 98. See also Kemper, *Hidden Talent*, 71.

⁴⁴ "Light and Noir: Exiles and Émigrés in Hollywood, 1933–1950," Exhibit that ran from February 23, 2014 through March 1, 2015. Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles (a co-exhibit with the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences). The exhibit featured a replica of Kohner's office.

other Jewish agents' refusal to give work to an actor simply because of an ethnic or political orientation.⁴⁵

Was there an actual blacklist of “right-wing” actors? If so, this would change the standard narrative of the “McCarthy Era” that began with the blacklisting of Communist actors due to the House of Un-American Activities Committee investigations in 1947.⁴⁶ Corrado felt certain that the better roles were withheld from him in the late 1930s and throughout the war because of his alleged political affiliation. Though it seems that his fears were exaggerated, there may be some truth to his accusation. In fact, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League issued a public statement in newspapers and trade journals aimed at Mussolini's supporters in Hollywood in October 1937. The paid advertisements and inserted leaflets—soon quoted as a news story in nationwide newspapers—sought to make ideological foes of the multitude of Hollywood actors who celebrated with the young Mussolini. One sentence, ironic given the organization's ties to international communism and their promotion of Moscow's peace plan, can be read as branding the

⁴⁵ Gino Corrado interviewed by Bill Cappello, Van Nuys, CA 4 May 1976, Tape 1 and 2.

⁴⁶ “Introduction: Meet the People,” in Patrick Milligan and Paul Buhle (eds.). *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), xiv-xviii. The authors write that left-wing political activity by those alleged communists began during the Depression and was tolerated or utilized by the industry in the talent that created anti-Nazi or pro-Soviet propaganda films (many of which, ironically, Corrado appeared in). In 1947, a meeting of industry executives at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York produced a secret list. “Their consensus to fire the [alleged communist] Ten and to institute loyalty oaths and other measures effectively launched the industry-wide blacklist.”

Roach-Mussolini deal as Un-American: “[t]hose who welcome him are opening their arms to a friend of Hitler and an enemy of Democracy.”⁴⁷

Most invitees ignored the edict and instead attended the Roach party. Much to the frustration of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League cadre, several of those who originally planned to boycott the event had changed their minds. As a local reporter that attended the celebration noted, “curiosity triumphed over revenge... The blackballers were the first to arrive... A few stayed away in protest; not many.”⁴⁸ Names of those that attended the party were distributed and posted on bulletin boards in studios as a kind of blacklist by the organization.⁴⁹ With the anti-Mussolini campaign assigned top priority by the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, Corrado and his brother were likely mentioned by the membership comprising of movieland directors, writers, and producers at Hollywood Anti-Nazi League meetings—a membership roster of about 4,000 to 5,000 if the highest estimate is to be believed.⁵⁰ Also, the organization was well-funded, and had a radio broadcast from its highly visible headquarters at 6912 Hollywood Boulevard literally in the very heart of movieland across from the hallowed Grauman’s Chinese Theater’s touristic footprint forecourt. The group sponsored two entire radio programs that

⁴⁷ “Il Duce Son to Meet Picture Notables at Birthday Party,” *Hollywood Citizen News*, 28 September 1937, 1.

⁴⁸ Ed Sullivan in Hollywood,” *Hollywood Citizen News*, 29 September 1937, 5.

⁴⁹ Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 133.

⁵⁰ Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund. *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980), 107-108, 125.

attempted to explain the fascist connections of Vittorio Mussolini and expose the venture's films as likely to contain subtle propaganda that would influence movie-viewers to sympathize with fascism.⁵¹

Federal Bureau of Investigation records available under the Freedom of Information Act do not reveal Gino Corrado or brother Louis Liserani under surveillance by the federal government, but the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League's internal memos do mention of Louis Liserani.⁵² According to the organization's man in charge of maintaining the master file of investigated groups and individuals, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League formed a massive spy network whose chief function was to discover "what were all [the] Anti-Semites doing, not only the Nazis and some of the Fascist Black Shirts, all of them: the Silver Shirts, the Ku Klux Klan, some little two-by-four outfit that came into existence today and maybe died a year later..."⁵³ Internal correspondence of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League reveals the local Sons of Italy chapter was infiltrated and its leader watched, and Italians in prominent positions in other patriotic and fraternal clubs such as the Dante Alighieri, the American Legion, Italian Veterans, and even the

⁵¹ "Threat Sent Anti-Nazi Group: Letter Orders Stop to Broadcasting Done by League Speaker," *Los Angeles Times* 30 November 1937, 1. The HANL aired two weekly shows on KFWB. Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund. *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980), 108. See also "Roach-Il Duce Son Film Plans Draw Protest," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 30 September 1937, 1.

⁵² A request from the Washington DC Federal Bureau of Investigation (local field office records do not go that far back) for Gino Liserani's complete surveillance file was unsuccessful as he never had one. See Freedom of Information-Privacy Acts (FOIPA) 11231827-000 for Liserani, Gino Corrado on 10 December 2008.

⁵³ Joseph Roos, "Oral History," 11. Community Relations Committee, Urban Archies Center, California State University Northridge.

Elks, were being closely monitored. To expose the members of groups as anti-Semitic (and thus anti-American) a newsletter with a press run of a thousand copies was distributed and sent to columnists in national newspapers.⁵⁴

The organization even had special access to photographs in the files of the *Los Angeles Times* News Service with images of Italian-Americans in uniform being particularly sought after to bolster the case that, as editor Joseph Roos claimed, “...Nostra America must be prevented, to render early and decisive assistance to Great Britain.” Linking Italy and Germany as united in a subterfuge against America, Roos used alarmist language against Italians at home: “Each new day yields fresh proof that Mussolinians in America carry on ideological sabotage just as unscrupulously and brazenly as their Nazi accomplices.”⁵⁵

Corrado should have considered himself lucky, because of all those groups suspected of being “Enemy Aliens” during the wartime frenzy, those of Japanese ancestry fared the worst, as Corrado’s brother, in a weird turn of events, soon found o

⁵⁴ Edward Chodorov, writer, offered Jack Warner a detailed list of “native fascists” possibly containing the names of Corrado or his brothers, that “might want to beat Hitler, but save fascism for the world.” See Bob Herzberg, *The Left Side of the Screen: Communist and Left-Wing Ideology in Hollywood, 1929-2009* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 124.

⁵⁵ *News Letter* (Published by the News Research Service, Inc.), Vol. 5, No. 141; April 23, 1941: 8. Inventory of the California Un-American Activities Committee Records, Box 27, Folder 10.3. California State Archives, Sacramento, CA. The issue focuses on Italian-language schools in the United States and is headlined, “Italo-American Subversivism Parallels U.S.-Nazi Plotting.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

FROM ROME TO LITTLE TOKYO:

JAPANESE INTERNMENT AND *SECRET AGENT OF JAPAN*

The days of the ‘Little Tokyos’ are past; from now on, we must constantly stress that we look to Washington only.

Yamato Ichihashi (an internee at Santa Anita Assembly Center).¹

By early 1941, America had already committed itself to the war effort as Franklin Delano Roosevelt publicly promised ships, trains, guns, and food to Britain, as well as a commitment to aid China in its fight against the Japanese invasion. The “arsenal of democracy”—what he asserted America would become in these extraordinary times—also faced another threat the President claimed in a speech in March: “From the bureaus of propaganda of the Axis Powers came the confident prophecy that the conquest of our country would be ‘an inside job’—a job accomplished not by overpowering invasion from without, but by disrupting confusion and disunion and moral disintegration from within.”²

Two weeks later, as Britain denied safe passage to ships from nations it was fighting, coupled with America’s probability of entering the war, Roosevelt ordered the

¹ Gordon H. Chang. *Morning Glory, Evening Shadow: Yamato Ichihashi and His Internment Writings, 1942-1945*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 64.

² *Democracy in Action*, Address by Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the White House Correspondents’ Annual Dinner at the Willard Hotel, 15 March 1941. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1941, 1.

seizure of Italian, German, and Danish ships anchored in American ports (including the Panama Canal Zone) that were idle, under the pretext they could be sabotaged. In May, over 1,300 Italian nationals (seamen, cruise ship workers, and workers from the World's Fair in New York) were sent to Fort Missoula, Montana detention center.³

News of these detentions, and other legislative acts, prompted many longtime Italian residents in America to become citizens. The summer of 1941 proved that America was clearly entering the European conflict on the side of Britain when Roosevelt froze all assets of Italian citizens living in America. The finances of over one million people were affected including that of Corrado and several of his family members. Front page headlines reported that Italians could no longer make large withdrawals from an American bank unless authorized by the United States Treasury. Nor could Corrado own or transfer property in his name, according to the legislation. Corrado's uncle, a naturalized American citizen who owned a business in Italy, was possibly affected when Mussolini retaliated by seizing American-owned properties. On July 31, all pretense at negotiation was scrapped when Italian consuls were sent home on U.S. Navy vessels and American consuls in Italy were recalled.⁴

The impending crisis in Europe prompted Corrado to become a naturalized citizen after several decades of living in America. Corrado took his citizenship oath in

³ Lawrence DiStasi, (ed.), *Una Storia Segreta: The Secret History of Italian American Evacuation and Internment During World War II* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2001), 313.

⁴ "Ships Bearing Consuls Due at Noon Today," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 August 1941, 1. See also Roosevelt Freezes Axis Assets," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 1941, 1.

August of 1941 and he possibly persuaded his mother a few months later to take the oath—a recitation that included the rejecting of the authority of the King of Italy and Benito Mussolini by name.⁵ The oath was unnecessary for both of Corrado’s living brothers who were born in America, though interestingly, they celebrated their Italianita, were in Italian patriotic organizations, sent their children to Italian language school—and in some ways were more “Italian” than their Italian-born brother. Corrado found expressions of his Italian pride through manifestations such as the Italian-language theater, the Eleanora Duse club being a perfect example of an organization used by the Italian government. Many Italians celebrated their “Italianita,” or ethnic pride in Mussolini government-sponsored events, a contrast to the democratic traditions espoused in America. But in time of national crisis virtually all Italians in America went with their adopted nation.⁶

Corrado and his brothers had already taken small assimilative steps. Not one of Corrado’s brothers or uncles married an Italian—nevermind someone from Tuscany. All the wives of the Liserani males were either German, Scandinavian, or Irish immigrants, or American English-speaking women, such as the case with Louis Liserani’s American-

⁵ U.S. Naturalization Records Index, no. 5254513.

⁶ Gloria Ricci-Lothrop, “A Shadow on the Land: the Impact of Fascism on Los Angeles Italians,” *California History* (Winter 1996/1997): 340. In her article, historian Gloria Ricci-Lothrop explains the dilemma Corrado would have faced and how his experience was part of a larger pattern affecting the city’s Italians. “In the 1920s the Italo-American community of Los Angeles, often referred to as ‘La Colonia’ [by the Italian consul], gradually enhanced by increased numbers and increased economic prosperity, was particularly enriched by the activism of recent arrivals in various cultural affairs. As a result, it developed a growing cohesiveness, nourished in part by programs that would later be discovered to have been sponsored or co-opted by the Fascist government.”

born wife. Corrado's brothers changed their names, such as Lorenzo to Lawrence. Corrado's uncle Cyro Liserani, of whom little is known, went one further and Americanized his name to Cyrus Lizerany. Even Gino Corrado, who learned English, was known to the public as Gene Corey for five years beginning just prior to the First World War.⁷

In all probability, Corrado feared further restrictions when he decided to become a citizen. This was a similar route to citizenship taken by many Italian immigrants of this period who feared limitations on the freedom of movement or deportation as a citizen of an Axis country. On August 9, the very day that Corrado naturalized, the *Times* speculated that America and Britain would draft a stern warning to Japan the next day, which would likely include a threat that the two nations would not be indifferent if Japan attacked the Soviet Union. The British-American attitude, the report continued, was that the anti-Axis powers would be further militarizing their possessions and colonies in the Western Pacific.⁸

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and America was at war, the thousands of Italians residing in America, including those employed as teachers, were interned. In San Francisco (the West Coast city with the most Italians) for instance, enemy aliens who were teachers were detained at any of California's twelve Italian-

⁷ These assimilative steps are mentioned in Victor Greene, "Becoming American: The Role of Ethnic Leaders—Swedes, Poles, Italians, Jews," in Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'Alroy Jones (eds.), *The Ethnic Frontier: Essays in the History of Group Survival in Chicago and the Midwest* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 162.

⁸ "Sternest Anglo-American Warning to Japan Drafted," *Los Angeles Times* 9 August 1941, 1.

language schools that were government-funded. Joseph Roos, who sent his newsletter (that had been utilized by the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League) to senators and government officials, including California State Senator Jack Tenney, hoped that his articles would explain the threat conclusively with translations of Rome-edited textbooks and pictures such as one of Italian-American school children displaying the Roman salute upon return from meeting Il Duce in Italy. One newsletter issue published by Roos six months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, was later sent by him to Senator Tenney in May of 1942 with the intent that, as he put it in a letter, “might help greatly in the formulation of questions put to witnesses” in a hearing on Italian school activities in San Francisco.⁹

Roos claimed that pro-axis propaganda emanated from language schools, consulate officials, Italian immigrant newspapers, but also wherever Italians congregated such as patriotic societies like the Sons of Italy, restaurants (described as “unorganized ‘spaghetti joints’”), and especially “theaters catering to Italian audiences.”¹⁰ In New York City, the owners of two exclusive Italian-language movie theaters, the Roma Cine Teatro and Cine Citta, were singled out by Roos, as agents that baited audiences not in the feature films, but rather in the short films that ran before the main pictures, which it was

⁹ Letter, dated 8 May 1942, from Joseph Roos (News research Service, Inc.) to Senator Jack B. Tenney. Inventory of the California Un-American Activities Committee Records, Box 27, folder 10.3. California State Archives, Sacramento.

¹⁰ “Fascismo Says it with Movies,” Research Supplement (Published by the News Research Service Inc in Los Angeles), Vol. 5, No. 142; April 23, 1941, 1-2. Inventory of the California Un-American Activities Committee Records, Box 27, Folder 10.3. California State Archives, Sacramento. For where “Mussolitalians” congregate, i.e. “Spaghetti Joints”, see *News Letter*, Vol. 5, no. 130: 2.

claimed were often furnished by Amerital, a distributor which was an official Italian film propaganda agency.¹¹

Those Italian nationals who were detained, interned, or deported also included several radio stars and movie actors. One such was Tullio Carminati, an Italian actor who moved back and forth from Italy to America with ease in the early twenties. He starred with and directed Italy's beloved actress Eleanor Duse, as well as made a picture for Germany's UFA studio. Carminati became a leading man in Hollywood briefly during the silent era then returned in 1937. His deportation made the news when war was declared. The reason given for his expulsion according to *Variety* was simply stated that his "pro-Fascist talk got him into trouble." Actress Miriam Hopkins who was scheduled to appear opposite the Italian actor in a New York stage version of *The Guardsman* in 1931, cancelled her contract when she overheard Carminati exalting Italian fascism. Hopkins later claimed she told the actor "I'll never appear on the same stage or even in the same room as you." It is likely that Hopkins related this incident to her husband, Anotole Litvak, an actor, and a Jewish émigré from Hitler's Germany, a later leader of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, and director of Hollywood's first anti-fascist picture *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*. In this context, Carminati was later investigated, monitored, and denounced as a traitor, probably by the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (or by Anatole Litvak himself) to the House of Un-American Activities Committee. He was questioned

¹¹ *News Letter* (Published by the News Research Service, Inc.), Vol. 5, No. 142; April 23, 1941, 1-2. Inventory of the California Un-American Activities Committee Records, Box 27, Folder 10.3. California State Archives, Sacramento.

and given an official offer to stay in the country only if he took American citizenship and renounced his Italian citizenship and his allegiance to Mussolini. Carminati chose deportation and was sent back to Rome.¹²

As for the many German émigrés that comprised a large portion of the rank and file of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, their nationality required them, as citizens of a hostile nation, to register as enemy aliens and observe an 8pm curfew. Despite protests to the President of the United States from aliens such as scientist Albert Einstein (who was then teaching at Cal-Tech in Pasadena), many accepted the war-time restrictions. One émigré, a writer at MGM and Warner Brothers, explained: “In Hollywood most refugees good-naturedly accepted the restriction of their liberty” when they too became convinced of the threat of a ‘Fifth Column.’”¹³ Several émigré film workers (writers, directors, and actors) joined the government’s Office of War Information coordinated by John Houseman, an articulate actor and later producer for MGM. Houseman, a Romanian-born Jew and committed anti-fascist, had once worked with Orson Welles in New York in *Julius Caesar*, a WPA-funded play that ridiculed the rise of Benito Mussolini.

Corrado was a newly naturalized American citizen, but Italian citizens in his community were classified as “resident enemy aliens.” Possibly, this included his father. The U.S. defeats at the hands of the Japanese early in the war caused the public to become alarmed about the vulnerability of west coast defenses from sabotage. There

¹² “Good-Bye, Carminati,” *Variety* 20 May 1942, 1. See also *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 8 September 1948, 35 and 29 June 1944, 21.

¹³ Salka Viertel, *Kindness of Strangers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 261.

were three alien groups residing in California. Italians were the largest with a population of 52,008, the Japanese numbered 38,171, and Germans 19,417. Members of the Italian-language media such as newspaper editors, teachers, and radio personalities were deemed a threat to the nation's security. By January 1942, at least 135 enemy alien Italians were being held at a camp in Tujunga, just ten miles from Corrado's residence.¹⁴

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the hysteria of possible fifth column activity on the West Coast swept the nation. Similar to Italian nationalist groups in America, the Japanese had several patriotic leagues, with the Society of the Black Dragon being the most notorious at the start of the war. While Italy had sought the help of its Italians living in America to change negative public opinion about the Italo-Ethiopian War, Japan waged a similar propaganda battle for the Sino-Japanese War. Chiefly comprised of Issei (the Japanese-born first generation residents of America), these Japanese ultra-patriots tried to convince those in their ethnic community that Japan was liberating China from years of oppressive European—mainly British—colonization by incorporating them into their wider Asian empire.¹⁵

“Kibei” were first generation Japanese-Americans, but with an elevated status of having been schooled in Japan. Similar to Italians, many Japanese retained dual

¹⁴ Gloria Ricci Lothrop, “Unwelcome in Freedom's Land: the Impact of World War II on Italian Aliens in Southern California,” *Southern California Quarterly* (Winter 1999): 518.

¹⁵ As late as 1940 *Rafu Shimpo*, a newspaper of the Japanese immigrant community in Los Angeles, promoted the Manchouko puppet state and the Japanese soldiers as liberators. See pages 98-99 in Scott Kurishige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). Japan tried to insert a racial equality clause in the League of Nations charter of 1919 to show Japan as a uniquely Westernized European nation, and also as a leader of colored peoples against white supremacy. See page 74.

citizenship, and an astounding 12,000 Kibei (one-third of those living in California) were registered with their local consulate as Japanese citizens. After public school hours, many Nisei (second-generation and American born) attended one of the 248 Japanese language schools in America that were active in 1941 for the purpose of retaining cultural values and language, but often the lessons culminated in nationalist indoctrination.¹⁶ Class assignments sometimes included students writing letters of encouragement to the Japanese military; one sent to a Japanese soldier serving on the front in China mentioned how it was “hard for us who live in sunny Southern California to imagine your hardships...According the latest news, we learn that the Imperial Army is launching its final attack on Nanking. We get excited every time we see the morning newspaper.”¹⁷ The local Japanese-American press was exuberant in its praise of the heroism regarding Japanese exploits in China and sometimes printed verbatim Japanese government propaganda pieces.¹⁸

Several Hollywood stars and producers had Japanese servants (including Hal Roach) and at least one Japanese-American in Hollywood, Toraichi Kono, who was

¹⁶ Joseph C. Roucek. “American Japanese, Pearl Harbor, and World War II,” *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Autumn 1943): 633-636.

¹⁷ Yuji Ichioka, “Japanese Immigrant Nationalism: The Issei and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941.” *California Historical Quarterly*, Fall 1990: 266.

¹⁸ Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 96.

Charlie Chaplin's caretaker, secretary, and chauffeur for eighteen years (and appeared in bit parts in a few of Chaplin's early films) was investigated for spying.¹⁹

On the cinematic home front, the first film released about the Japanese in America that helped fuel wartime paranoia was *Secret Agent of Japan*. Corrado was featured in a small bit part. In fact, filming for the picture commenced the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, as Daryl Zanuck of Twentieth-Century Fox Studios wanted to make the first film for the American propaganda effort. The film's story was loosely adapted from a memoir of the same title, *Secret Agent of Japan*, a book written by Amleto Vespa and first published in 1938 that was meant to expose the Japanese government monopolies of 'white slavery, drug traffic and kidnapping' in China. Vespa, an Italian who lived in China, was a military adventurer, correspondent for Italian newspapers, cinema manager and owner, and a secret agent for the Chinese.²⁰

When initially approached by a Japanese intelligence officer chief to join Japan, a cautious Vespa calmly explained that "changing one's citizenship is not the same as changing a cinema program." Fearing harm that may come to his family should he refuse giving his service, Vespa was successfully pressed into service for the Japanese in China.

¹⁹ For a documentary film (that remains still unreleased at the time of publication) about Kono, *Toriachi Kono: A Life in Hollywood*, see www.konofilm.com. According to the website, Kono, "one of lost bit players in the history of Hollywood," had become in 1941 a chauffeur for a theater-owner who was the partner of Alexander Pantages. Kono was arrested in June of 1941 for espionage and later released in favor of deportation. Kono was again taken into custody after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and held at various camps including Fort Missoula in Montana.

²⁰ Amleto Vespa, *Secret Agent of Japan* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing, 1941), 11; 43; and 280. Vespa owned the Atlantic theatre in Harbin, and along with two Russian business associates, owned an interest in several others.

Vespa had earlier switched his nationality to Chinese to escape Italian efforts to have him deported from China after his success in confiscating Italian smuggled arms; thus he could garner no extra-territorial rights from Italian consulate officials despite being a loyal fascist.²¹

Vespa lived in Harbin, the main city in northern Manchuria near the border of Russia that was a railway center largely built by the Russians. For the screen version of *Secret Agent of Japan*, the story is set in Shanghai, a Chinese city more familiar to American audiences (and even more of an international city where 30,000 White Russians that had fled the Soviet Red Revolution resided, most of these having been former residents of Harbin who thought they had successfully escaped Japanese occupation). An opening scene of the film takes place at the upscale Bar Dixie in a hotel in Shanghai, and as the camera tracks the length of the bar, Germans, Russians, Italians, and Americans—spies or businessmen—discuss an imminent war with Japan. Seated at the bar is Gino Corrado, presumably a secret agent similarly well-dressed like the dapper Vespa, wearing a tux and conversing in Italian to one of his countrymen. Owned by an American, the Bar Dixie is similar to Rick's Café Américain from another later film (in which Corrado also appears), *Casablanca*, which sought sympathy for an occupied France.

When Manchuria declared its independence from China, the region was soon made a puppet state by imperial Japan that sought to make the province pay for its own

²¹Vespa, *Secret Agent of Japan* Ibid, 10.

colonization process by granting monopolies to rich Chinese, Russians, and Jews. With the Japanese soon in control of Shanghai and with international influence in the city waning, the American bar owner made an offer to partner or sell out to the Japanese intelligence officer chief, himself a gambling racketeer who has had his eye on the money-making hotel and bar. Upon his refusal to negotiate, the owner witnesses his business partner, an Eastern European Jew, murdered by Japanese special agents. He himself is arrested and after escaping finds his establishment confiscated and operated by Japanese.

The film only takes elements of the original story—simplifying much for the sake of propaganda—such as the forced collaboration that was based on Vespa (until eventually escaping in 1937). The business partner character in the film was based on Josephe Kaste who was a Jewish jeweler, co-owner of the elegant Hotel Moderne in Harbin, and president of a theatrical company that operated several movie theaters. His son (a French citizen) was kidnapped, held for ransom, and murdered in Harbin—a crime whose international complexities gave it worldwide attention.²² He would also see his cinemas taken by the Japanese. In the movie version, once the Bar Dixie falls into Japanese hands the patrons inside are henceforth only Germans and Italians, the latter including a jovial Corrado playing roulette and smoking.

Meant to illicit sympathy for an embattled China, the film's story of an American in China refusing a partnership with the Japanese agents is allegorical of Roosevelt's

²² See Vespa, *Secret Agent of Japan*, 205-212.

policies of backing China, enacting a trade embargo with Japan, militarizing the Philippines, and freezing Japanese bank assets in America—political saber rattling that the Japanese claimed had systematically led to war.²³

The film *Secret Agent of Japan* conveyed obvious patriotic messages to its viewers including a radio announcement in one scene that blares “America will not desert China.” In another scene a Japanese agent conveniently boasts of Japan’s secret plans for victory in the Pacific that would include Japanese spies in Honolulu helping locate a great American naval base. “Get rid of your Fifth Columnists, and you’ve won half the battle,” the American Naval Commander in Shanghai warns just prior to being taken as a prisoner of war. The lead character (the former bar owner) is also arrested and forcibly marched for a long duration by Japanese soldiers. “How far do we have to walk to get shot?” he bellows before being liberated by Chinese members of the Friends of China, an American group that was supported by Hollywood elites such as the head of the studio that produced the film, Darryl Zanuck.

According to a *New York Times* reviewer, *Secret Agent of Japan* had a few positive scenes where “desultory torture is suggested” and another where the hero mutters at a Japanese secret agent, “You son of a rising sun,” but otherwise it failed to inspire. Comparing the movie to another popular film series in which Corrado also appeared, the reviewer explained it was “hardly more intemperate than many of Charlie Chan’s sorties against enemy agents—the difference being that this time the producers have called a Jap

²³ Roland W. Worth, Jr., *No Choice But War: The United States Embargo Against Japan and Eruption of War in the Pacific* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995), 46-47; 123.

a Jap” The reviewer went on to say that the film would not even insult Emperor Hirohito himself, for the weak story was only “a very mild hate-brew.” Though not racist or at least nationalist enough for an America on the warpath, in some nonaligned nations the film garnered the distinction of being the first American movie to be banned at the request of the Japanese consulate in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where a strict neutrality policy forbade any public discussion on international affairs.²⁴

Japanese Internment

In 1942, two Jewish journalists, Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn, attempted to expose fascist espionage in America in *Sabotage! The Secret War against America*, a best-selling book. According to the authors (who would, ironically, later find themselves blacklisted in the early 1950s for their communist ties), the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 was enabled by a massive spy network in America orchestrated from Japan. Executive order 9066, which forced the relocation of 110,000 ethnic Japanese from restricted areas on the West Coast to areas inland, garnered the approval of the two authors who wrote that with this measure the spying activities of the “Tokyo-controlled organizations in Japanese-American communities” received “a major setback.”²⁵ One Japanese language newspaper in Los Angeles reported on the political climate in Los Angeles just as the public hysteria was beginning to set in: “The potential value of loyal Americans of Japanese ancestry in the nation’s war effort to defeat Japan is

²⁴ “Argentina Bans U.S. Films,” *New York Times*, 8 August 1942, 5.

²⁵ Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn, *Sabotage!: The Secret War Against America* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1942), 68.

being minimized or overlooked completely in Los Angeles County.” The paper warned that “Dangerous precedents are being set up in the treatment of the citizen minority that may pave the way for similar treatment of other groups.”²⁶

In early 1942, the Army Corp of Engineers had constructed three assembly centers in only twenty-eight days, where Japanese and Japanese-Americans were forced to relocate. These facilities, whenever possible, were set up at racetracks or fairgrounds for reasons of immediate occupancy, space, and the availability of utilities.²⁷

One such center was on Hollywood’s turf, quite literally. The largest, Santa Anita Assembly Center in Arcadia, was in existence from March to October in 1942, longer than any other assembly centers. Santa Anita was previously a popular horse racetrack that opened in 1934 and was operated by the Los Angeles Turf Club. Two of the club’s owners were Mack Sennett and Hal Roach—studio heads that Corrado knew quite well—and Santa Anita Racetrack soon became a movieland favorite with pricey box seats occupied by the likes of Walt Disney and Daryl Zanuck.²⁸ Louis B. Mayer, America’s highest-paid executive in 1937, was a fixture at the track cheering the high-priced horses

²⁶ *Rafu Shimpō*, 14 February, 1942, E1. (Named after its founder, this was the oldest and largest Japanese daily newspaper in Southern California.) Quoted from Kazau Abiko, *California’s Japanese-language Press, 1941-1942: Voices of the Uprooted Minority* (Masters Thesis, California State University Northridge, 1979), 120

²⁷ Anthony Lehman, *Birthright of Barbed Wire: The Santa Anita Assembly Center for the Japanese* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1970), 16-17.

²⁸ Jim Heinmann, *Out With the Stars: Hollywood Nightlife in the Golden Era* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 119. See also Richard Lewis Ward, *History of the Hal Roach Studios* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005,) 99.

he owned along with actor Clark Gable who often betted on them.²⁹ Commenting before the war in a letter to a friend in New York who was thinking about moving to Hollywood, scriptwriter and biographer Gene Fowler attempted to discourage him, and claimed that any day at Santa Anita one could see the throngs of unhappy Hollywood wives “who wear so much jewelry that it seems they are carrying brass knuckles and the [ice] trays of a Frigidaire on each hand.”³⁰ But now for the war, Santa Anita was quickly converted into an evacuation camp. New barracks were built, and its horse stalls were converted into living quarters, housing half the camp’s occupants.

With Santa Anita in use by the government, Hollywood’s jet set needed a locale to race their thoroughbreds. Many looked south of the border where an Italian-born, American-reared, business magnate Bruno Pagliali who had invested in a hotel and ranch in Ensenada as a playground for movie folk, was working with the Mexican government to open the western hemisphere’s largest track just four-and-a-half miles outside of Mexico City. Though horse-racing had practically vanished with the 1910 Revolution, and had been recently banned, Pagliali convinced the Mexican president that the construction of the beautiful race track would bolster Good Neighbor relations and to lift the ban. With a noted American architect as a partner and designer of the stadium, the opening of the race track called the Hipodromo de las Americas (or Hippodrome) was

²⁹ Sheilah Graham, *My Holywood: A Celebration and a Lament* (London, UK: Michael Joseph Limited, 1984), 56-57.

³⁰ Letter, undated (circa 1938), from Gene Fowler sent to Burt MacBride (publisher of *Cosmopolitan* and *Reader’s Digest*), 3. Gene Fowler Papers, Box 1, Folder 1. University of California Riverside, Special Collections Library.

announced in American papers to lure many top horses. Hedda Hopper wrote in her gossip column: “Attention horse lovers, owners, and gamblers, sometime in February [actually March 1943] a group of American businessmen will open at Mexico City as fine a race track as Santa Anita, and will offer the largest purse in racing history—\$125,000. They hope plane service between here and there will be running smoothly, and also hope horse owners like Louis B. Mayer, Al Vanderbilt, etc., will send down their ponies.”³¹ *Time* magazine proclaimed that the Hipodromo would “out-glamour California’s fabulous Santa Anita Race Track”—not difficult given the new official use for the world’s most ornamental race track.³²

Many of America’s interned Japanese, two-thirds being American citizens, passed through Santa Anita, waiting to be sent to one of the inland relocation centers in California that was being constructed or prepared, such as Manzanar near Lone Pine, or even further away, to camps in Arizona, Oregon, Montana, or Arkansas. Viewed from a distance on an approaching train, one evacuee marveled at the grandeur of the Santa Anita that was not unlike a vacation resort. As the train neared it seemed a mirage as he witnessed the “faces young and old, looking out from inside the camp as if in search of

³¹ “Hedda Hopper’s Hollywood, *Los Angeles Times* 22 September 1942, 14.

³² “Sport: Good Neighbor’s Race Track,” *Time* 15 February 1943. John Sloan was the Hipodromo’s architect. See also Mexico Lifts Ban on Horse Racing,” *Los Angeles Times* 3 August 1941, 26.

some in-explainable something through the six feet high barbed wire fence which, I later learned, surrounded the outer limits of the camp.”³³

Propaganda radio in Japan seized the opportunity to report that the incarceration of Japanese-Americans was proof that the United States was waging racial warfare against Asian peoples. Japanese broadcasts aimed at recently conquered lands told listeners that they too would suffer the same injustices as other racial minorities in America such as blacks and Mexican-Americans. However, when the American public learned about the Bataan Death March in the Philippines and how American troops were brutalized and starved, attention turned toward the treatment of Japanese prisoners of war. In comparison, captured Japanese soldiers were well-treated and received three meals a day. In similar fashion, the Japanese internees, their treatment guaranteed as American citizens under the Constitution, as well as their potential danger, was a great source of debate in America.³⁴

In a twisted irony, Luis Liserani, the younger brother of Gino Corrado who was possibly under surveillance for his fascist activities, was given a job as Chief Steward of the commissary at the Santa Anita Assembly Center. Liserani had recently moved to Alhambra where he once lived in the 1920s as he worked as the head of catering at the

³³ “Japanese American Citizens League”, June 9, 1942 F3729:149. Social Welfare-War Services-Reports-Control Stations-Sacramento-Yuba City. California State Archives, Sacramento. Accessed electronically from www.learnCalifornia.org.

³⁴ *Issei, Nissei, Kibbei* pamphlet published by *Fortune Magazine*, April 1944. “Fortune Magazine reviews the program of the War Relocation Authority and the Problems created by the Evacuation from the West Coast of 110,000 People of Japanese Descent,” 1.

Midwick Country Club, an elite club that boasted one of Southern California's best golf greens and polo grounds and thus had many prominent Hollywood people as members—such as Walt Disney—and catering to them may not have been too different than previous jobs. Despite the A-list clientele, the 208-acre club suffered during the latter years of the Depression and was sold at auction in 1941.³⁵

Liserani was experienced in catering to large groups. His resume included positions such as steward for the Munchers Café at Fox Studios (at the Western Avenue plant) where he oversaw a staff of twelve serve about 150 movie workers who lunched on the lot.³⁶ After the repeal of prohibition, Liserani moved to Willard's Restaurant, a popular café down the street from the Fox lot, where unlike the strict rules inside the movie studio, it served its patrons alcohol.³⁷ Liserani was in charge of the restaurant's catering division (usually serving the Twentieth Century-Fox movie studio lots and location sets), and though the number of daily customers served at Willard's may have occasionally superseded 500, both of his previous positions paled in comparison to the demands of the Santa Anita Assembly Center.³⁸

Liserani ran all the camp's mess halls in compliance with orders that it fall within those same prescribed by the Army for its soldiers. This was no easy undertaking

³⁵ Cecilia Rasmussen, L.A. Scene? The City Then and Now," *Los Angeles Times* 19 July 1993, 3.

³⁶ "Hollywood's Film Shop" *Dunkirk Evening Observer* (Dunkirk, New York) 29 January, 1930, 11.

³⁷ David Larsen, "Eatery's Trick Menu Featured Elephant Au Gratin," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 December 1978, A3. See also Los Angeles 1934 City Directory, 1027.

³⁸ *Final Report. Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast, 1942* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 186.

considering wartime rationing, and the number of evacuees—18,257 at its peak.³⁹ The camp measured about one square mile, and had six mess halls in different areas serving about 3,500 to 4,000 people at each of the three mealtimes. So large was the operation that the cooks had to use shovels to transfer the food into the large pans.⁴⁰ Due to the temporary nature of the Assembly Center (which was originally meant to close in six months once the evacuees were sent to permanent internment camps), there was an insufficient amount of dishes, requiring them to be washed three times for each meal.⁴¹

The War Relocation Authority, the federal agency that ran the camps, recognized the importance of food in lifting morale and had instructed all stewards to provide good wholesome food to the evacuees liking, a difficult task considering the varied Americanized tastes of the Nissei as compared to the Issei.⁴² The largest single quantity item consumed was rice—6,000 pounds a week at one mess hall alone—but most meals were largely American in composition.⁴³

³⁹ Anthony Lehman, *Birthright of Barbed Wire: The Santa Anita Assembly Center for the Japanese* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1970), 24. A Report of Visit to Santa Anita Assembly Center-July 14 and 15, 1942 in Roger Daniels, *American Concentration Camps: June, 1942-December, 1942. Volume 6* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1989) mentions the amount (in July 1942) as 4,000 pounds of rice used weekly at Santa Anita Assembly Center.

⁴⁰ Letter to Clara Breed from Louise Ogawa, Arcadia, California. May 7, 1942. (Japanese American National Museum). See also Gordon H. Chang. *Morning Glory, Evening Shadow: Yamato Ichihashi and His Internment Writings, 1942-1945*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 103-107.

⁴¹ *Santa Anita Pacemaker* (Official camp newspaper written by internees), n.d. "Final Issue" 1942, 6.

⁴² "A Comprehensive Statement in Response to Senate Resolution No. 166," contained in *American Concentration Camps* 1943, Volume No. 7 (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1989), 13-14.

⁴³ Lehman, 26.

The food service and atmosphere varied, some letters from the internees described the fare as palatable. Many seemed to be annoyed at the ridiculously long lines: “[W]e stood two hours three times a day with pails in our hands like beggars to receive our meals.”⁴⁴ The situation was soon remedied with the establishment of a Mess Committee, an advisory group comprised of a cross-section of evacuees, that assigned buttons to be worn on the shirt—and later meal tickets—to indicate which mess hall one dined at.⁴⁵ At most of the assembly centers, meal tickets could also serve as passes to see movies shown at the camp. At Santa Anita, movies (usually second-run) were shown in the grandstands, and a night of entertainment on Friday, May 29, 1942, for example, included two Merry Melodies cartoons—likely starring Bugs Bunny—followed by the 1940 feature *Spring Parade* starring actress Deanna Durbin.⁴⁶ Films were usually supplied by the United States Army Motion Picture Service, and although official Army policy was, according to the Theater Officer’s Guide, not to censor any pictures “other than those pictures which portray U.S. Army life and activities,” films were carefully selected as to

⁴⁴ *Personal Justice Denied: report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians*, 141. The quote comes from the testimony of Misao Sakamoto in 1981.

⁴⁵ *Santa Anita Pacemaker*, n.d. “Final Issue” 1942, 10. *The Pacemaker* (page 6) lists the mess staff as follows: Mess and Lodging Director, Edward M. Paulsen; Mess Chief, F.O. Gwinn (who replaced Liserani?). The following are the Mess Stewards and that belonged to the corresponding six mess halls at Santa Anita: No. 1, P. Tesser; No. 2, J. Hart; No. 3, H. Spencer; No. 4, E. Ketron; No. 5, N. Deputy; and No. 6, J. Hilliard.

⁴⁶ Diary of Kazayu Jane Konman Matsukawa, entry for Friday, May 29, 1942. Konman-Matsukawa Family Papers, Japanese Service Committee Legacy Center, Chicago, IL. Another movie exhibited for internees at Santa Anita on July 30 and 31 was *Playmates* starring Kay Kyser, as reported in the *Pacemaker* (the camp’s newspaper), 1 August 1943, 4.

not incite or offend.⁴⁷ Leaving the camp to see what played on the outside was obviously prohibited, but one seventeen-year-old managed to sneak away to go see a new film at the nearest movie theater. When caught he was sent to another camp—separated from his parents for the next three years.⁴⁸

If accommodating the internees was not demanding enough, it would soon get worse. Serious accusations about the food service management at Santa Anita Assembly Center were made by a principal at an elementary school adjacent to the University of California Los Angeles who circulated a mimeographed letter for her students (mostly children of university faculty and staff) to take home. The letter claimed that rumors about the Santa Anita Center pointed to the possibility that officials were underfeeding the internees, and that babies and children—the most vulnerable—were suffering. The letter begged that “perhaps some of you may know of people in charge of the situation and can in some way recommend a serious investigation.” A few days later, the letter’s allegations made its way to the pages of the *Los Angeles Times* where it was successful in creating debate. Remsen Bird, the president of Occidental College (the nearest university to the Santa Anita Assembly Center), actually visited the camp several times and was quoted saying that there was ample food and that the management was doing the best it could, given the circumstances. Illustrating the symbolic importance of the camp’s food,

⁴⁷ *Theater Officers Guide for the Preparation of Reports and Forms* (U.S. Motion Picture Service: Washington, DC: June 1943), 6.

⁴⁸ *Personal Justice Denied*, 141. The youth was Sumiko Seo Seki.

he chastised the dissemination of rumors on the grounds that “criticism may do great damage to our American people here—and abroad.”⁴⁹

Descriptions of the mess halls by internees never mentioned starvation but often included complaints. One internee mentioned that the loud banging of the metal trays was annoying, but worse yet was that “supper consisted of a small quantity of baked spaghetti, a small potato, a little rice, and water.”⁵⁰ No chopsticks were issued, nor knives, to the evacuees—only spoons and forks.

Frances Kawabata, who as a teenager was paid \$16 a month for bussing tables and seating diners, remembers that the orange mess hall was the site of a small riot where food flew when several Japanese internees attacked a Korean (a conquered person of the Japanese empire) who was inadvertently placed in the camp.⁵¹ Santa Anita did not have the magnitude of violent incidents that were known at Manzanar such as a riot on December 7, 1942 that led to troops opening fire on a crowd, killing two and wounding ten others.⁵²

⁴⁹ “Santa Anita Center Officials Defended,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 May, 1942, 16. The original mimeographed letter, dated May 26, 1942, was written by Corrine A. Seeds, the principal of University Elementary School. The *Los Angeles Times* article (that quoted much of Seeds’ letter) did spark controversy. One angry letter from a woman visiting her former employee at Santa Anita accuses the paper of exaggerating the conditions at the camp. She wrote that her employee said that although he needed more toys for his three children, he had plenty of food, and was actually gaining weight. See *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1942, A4.

⁵⁰ Gordon H. Chang. *Morning Glory, Evening Shadow: Yamato Ichihashi and His Internment Writings, 1942-1945*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 107.

⁵¹ Interview with Frances Kawabata by author at the Japanese Service Committee Legacy Center, Chicago, IL, 26 March 2008.

⁵² Jasmine Alinder, *Moving Images: Photography and the Japanese American Incarceration* (Urbans, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 80. Some figures show a slightly lesser estimate of dead and injured.

In yet another melee, Luis Liserani was attacked by a mob of Japanese evacuees while working at the Santa Anita Mess Hall.⁵³ No official report was filed, but it was likely the same incident as described by Yamato Ichihashi, a Nisei evacuee at Santa Anita who was a professor at Stanford. In his diary, Ichihashi claimed that when the “chief cook”—probably Liserani—yelled at a Japanese waitress, “100 men eating there formed a circle [around Liserani] armed with forks and spoons.”⁵⁴ This corroborates a story Liserani later told to his son about being surrounded by a mob; however, in Liserani’s version, he added that they jabbed at him with forks with the intent to stab him. Ichihashi asserts that the episode was a culmination of bitterness, and that the chief cook ran away, and was never seen again, “so it is concluded that he must have resigned.”⁵⁵ Liserani did at some point resign as Chief Steward of the Santa Anita Assembly Center. For the next few years, he managed the cafeteria at the Terminal Annex, Los Angeles’s beautiful moderne main downtown post office. The building considered the nation’s finest working post office when built in 1940, contained 400,000 square feet that housed over 2,000 employees, and saw a large increase in mail because of the war.⁵⁶

⁵³ Luis Liserani Jr., phone conversations in 2007. The senior Luis Liserani never had his own version chronicled and it has been lost to history. He did briefly mention this incident to Luis Liserani Jr. as a child, on whom I base much of the story, and from which I have tried to assemble the facts.

⁵⁴ Gordon H. Chang. *Morning Glory, Evening Shadow: Yamato Ichihashi and His Internment Writings, 1942-1945*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 106-107.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “Postal Annex Dedicated,” *Los Angeles Times* 23 June 1940, A1.

Conditions in the kitchens at the camps were difficult. At another assembly center (and former horse track), Tanforan, in Northern California, events that same week rivaled Santa Anita. The fact that cooks actually unionized and decided to strike in the camp may be an indicator to the degree of stress involved, as one internee noted in a letter:

We thought we would not have any dinner tonight because the cooks went on strike. They really are overworked—preparing 3,000 meals. Then there have been considerable “personality difficulties.” The battle for prestige here is terrific—everyone wants to be somebody, it seems—any kind of work will do as long as they get the official badges that distinguish them. The waiters also joined the strike because they only have 1,000 dishes to feed 3,000 people and they have to get them out in a rush. I saw one Isei dishwasher slap a Nisei girl because she complained the cups were dirty. Their nerves are on edge in the cooking division because they are the target for many complaints when it is not really their fault.⁵⁷

Many cooks at the camps were experienced, and one at the Green Mess in Santa Anita had been the personal cook of famed western novelist and screenplay writer Zane Grey for 17 years.⁵⁸ At Manzanar, the Chief Project Steward, Joseph R. Winchester, was lucky to have hired a few evacuees in supervisory positions that had previous experience, including someone that had been a captain steward on an inter-ocean freighter that served up to ten thousand passengers, and just prior to being forced to evacuate to the camp, he had worked at the Miyaki Hotel, the finest hotel in the Little Tokyo area of Los Angeles. The largest single group of workers at the camp was engaged in food handling, and many of these workers would later organize for higher wages, calling themselves the Mess Hall

⁵⁷ John Model. *The Kikuchi Diary, Chronicles from an American Concentration Camp: The Tanforan Journals of Charles Kikuchi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 53-55.

⁵⁸ *Pacemaker*, 26 August 1942, 4.

Union Workers, though Winchester refused to recognize the group claiming that they did not represent all the workers. In a report to headquarters, he noted that the union “died with the ‘incident’ [riot of December 7] and there was no further challenge to the Chief Project Steward and the evacuee workers.”⁵⁹

At Santa Anita, anger had been caused initially by concerns such as improper washing facilities, poor drainage, and overcrowding—a horse stable originally built for one animal was occupied by five or six people. The sight of clothes hanging on lines outside the barracks and the rustic character of the internees (many were agricultural workers), caused Ichihashi to write that “we are fast being converted into veritable Okies.”⁶⁰ But visible in the correspondence of the evacuees, the food quality and block-long lines to get in the mess hall, was an overwhelming prime reason for low morale.

General John DeWitt claimed that the cost of feeding the camp was deferred by the evacuee labor of the Nisei used in making camouflage netting for the war effort. Isei were not allowed to work on this endeavor as it might violate provisions of the Geneva Convention about forced labor for prisoners of war.⁶¹ The Santa Anita Racetrack

⁵⁹ *Mess Operation Section* by Joseph R. Winchester (Chief Project Steward, March 19, 1942 to March 1, 1946. War Relocation Authority, Manzanar, California) February 1946, 18. Manzanar Collection. Special Collections, Northwestern University. Also, *Japanese-Americans in Relocation Centers*, War Relocation Authority, Washington, DC., 3-4. See also *Manzanar Free Press*, 20 March 1943, 3 for information on Teimatsu Ichijo, one of the six evacuees in supervisory positions under Chief Project Steward Joseph R. Winchester at Manzanar.

⁶⁰ Chang, 108.

⁶¹ Chang, 114. For food rationing at the camps see *Hearings on War Relocation Centers, Chandler Subcommittee, January-February, 1943*. (Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs—A Bill Providing for the transfer of certain functions of the War Relocation Authority to the War Department) reprinted in Daniels, *American Concentration Camps* Vol. 7 “We have this problem in our

grandstand gave the height necessary for the nets to be suspended while they were produced.⁶²

On June 16, 1942, evacuees went on strike mainly because of wages owed and dangerous work conditions. The food became a matter of contention, as it had not been to the satisfaction of the workers for several days, and it, along with safety issues of the jobsite, culminated in a strike. American newspapers made the situation seem as if the strike was about sauerkraut—a German dish—being served instead of Japanese food. Though the meal was the last straw (two small wieners, sauerkraut, and bread without butter), it was the low wages, the delay in being paid, and the bad conditions of the camouflage net workplace—“hot, dusty, and poisonous”—that created the conditions for a strike.⁶³

A few days later, one young female evacuee working on the camouflage nets wrote to a friend to describe another feeling prevalent in the camp, that of uncertainty about the upcoming relocation. As the Assembly Center began to distribute evacuees as

feeding program—the evacuees, at least the alien proportion are considered by the Provost Marshall General's Office to be subject to the Geneva Convention, which would require, in the judgment of the Army, that no rationing be applied.” 155

⁶² Lillian Baker (*American and Japanese Relocation in World War II: Fact, Fiction, and Fallacy*. Medford, Oregon: Webb Research Group, 1990), 39.

⁶³ Chang, 119. Just a few months before the war, the Santa Anita Race Track had been the site of a union jurisdictional dispute. Despite being in the confines of the Pasadena Central Labor Council, Santa Anita was granted as an extension of Los Angeles jurisdiction prior to Pasadena Local 531 being reorganized. The Pasadena Central Labor Council resolved that Local 531, as to not have to transfer its membership in order to work, agree to the same working rules as established by the Los Angeles Local Joint Executive Board. See *The Catering Industry Employee* (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, Hotel and Restaurant Employees' International Alliance and Bartenders International League of America). April 1941, Vol. 50, No. 4: 141-142.

far as Arkansas, the crowded conditions diminished, turning it into a ghost town.

However, the wait time for food did not decrease due to the lack of population:

...the length of the mess lines has not declined, but increased, because Green Mess has closed. I eat either at the Blue Mess or the White Mess now. Menus are as routined as ever. How is the eating and living condition over there?⁶⁴

Conditions improved, if only slightly. Perhaps this was a testament to Liserani's small part (or Corrado's, for that matter) when an Army inspection report noted that the Center was more Americanized than any other. "Possibly this is the Hollywood influence," the report concluded.⁶⁵ A survey report by the Army of all its assembly centers in July 1942 noted that the kitchen cleanliness was not up to Army standards, but that the cooking, especially the vegetables, "is better than the usual Army mess." The freshness of vegetables (and fruits) was probably due to several reasons: Santa Anita's location adjacent to California's great produce farms, the gardens in the camp maintained by the Japanese (many of which were expert gardeners), and the evacuees' distaste for canned food.

Consumption of alcohol was prohibited at Santa Anita. This created a black market. One sting operation by Deputy United States Marshals had the new Chief Steward who replaced Liserani, along with three civilians (one cook, a chef, and a

⁶⁴Diary of Kazayu Jane Konman Matsukawa, entry for Friday, May 22, 1942 (a transcribed letter from Vicky to Betty Niguma). Konman-Matsukawa Family Papers, Japanese Service Committee Legacy Center, Chicago, IL.

⁶⁵ Roger Daniels, *American Concentration Camps: A Documentary History of the Relocation and Incarceration of Japanese Americans, 1942-1945*. (London and New York: Garland Publishing, 1989); (Volume 6. June, 1942-December, 1942), Section titled "Army Inspections of Assembly Centers, July 1942." Letter to Lt. Col. Ira K. Evans, Report of visit to Santa Anita Assembly Center, July 14-15, 1942.

steward), booked for conspiring to sell alcohol to the internees—the intended profit on 48 pints of whiskey would have been 35 dollars.⁶⁶ Either due to rationing or scarcity, evacuees at other camps actually resorted to manufacturing their own Japanese foods. At Manzanar, where the riots prompted the director to experiment with self-sufficiency, equipment was purchased second-hand or was hand-made to manufacture items such as shoyu sauce, miso, and tofu. The Chief Project Steward at Manzanar proudly reported to the War Department that up to 700 pounds of tofu was produced each day at his camp at a cost of only four cents a pound—far more economical than the prevailing market rate of ten to twelve cents a pound.⁶⁷

In June, areas around power plants and vital strategic areas were opened up to Italian and German nationals, inflaming the Japanese still held in internment camps. One Nisei evacuee wrote from his assembly center that the order by “implying that the danger of sabotage is now gone with the Japanese evacuated,” was in itself racially biased.⁶⁸ By October 1942, however, resident alien Italians were completely exempt from enemy alien status.

⁶⁶ “Santa Anita Liquor Smuggling Plot Charged as Four Booked,” *Los Angeles Times* 8 August, 1942. p. A8. The names of those accused and held under a \$1000 bond were Adolph C. Fields, the chief steward; Chet D. Lybarger, chef; William W. Wilbur, cook; and Ernest W. Reed, steward.

⁶⁷ *Mess Operation Section* by Joseph R. Winchester (Chief Project Steward, March 19, 1942 to March 1, 1946. War Relocation Authority, Manzanar, California) February 1946, p. 13. Manzanar Collection. Special Collections, Northwestern University. See also Jasmine Alinder, *Moving Images: Photography and the Japanese American Incarceration* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press), 80-81.

⁶⁸ Chang, 152. Kikuchi wrote in his solution in his diary: “I believe the assembly centers should be closed up and the government should give us a hearing right away and if found ‘loyal’ be helped back into private life where we can be of some use instead of a financial burden on the government.”

In April 1943, General DeWitt considered a plan to release the Japanese from the evacuation camps under the condition that they support themselves and be acceptable to the community in which they resided. A previous precedent was set in the fall of 1942, when about ten thousand internees were granted short-term permits to harvest sugar beets in the fields of states outside the restricted areas. A few months later, in February 1943, about 2,000 evacuees left the relocation centers, having obtained indefinite leave permits, mostly granted to students to continue their studies. DeWitt had a representative contact the General President of the caterers union, Edward Florey, with the proposal that internees, many of which had experience in domestic or agricultural work, be employed in the restaurant and hotel industry. Florey, who represented most of America's unionized restaurant and hotel workers—including Liserani—responded, “We would not willingly agree to the invasion of our industry and would protest their placement in any hotel or restaurant under contractual relations with our International Union.”⁶⁹

Florey considered the Japanese a menace to the catering industry. A resolution was adopted by Joint Local Joint Executive Board of Los Angeles on April 28 that read: “Whereas it is the opinion of this body that the sentiments of persons of Japanese ancestry cannot be determined with certainty and that it is essential to the safety and welfare of this country during time of war to exercise proper control over Japanese residing in this country...Therefore, Be it Resolved that this body go on record as protesting any move to release Japanese from relocation centers and protesting the action

⁶⁹ *The Catering Industry Employee* June 1943, 43;2.

of Lt. General DeWitt.” This act by the union surely had an impact on delaying the resettlement of the Japanese in Southern California.

The movie studios showed almost total cooperation with the government’s chief propaganda agency, the newly formed Office of War Information (OWI) which sought to further the war effort through public understanding of the war. At times this made for complicated storylines with certain ethnicities. For example, the Polish army was demonized by the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League who took the Communist Party line that the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939 was a humanitarian effort to protect the rights of workers; likewise the movie studios sacrificed Polish characters in films to appease the OWI’s support of an American military alliance with the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ *In Our Time*, a Warner Brothers film released in 1944, takes place in Poland in 1939. A Polish count and British antique dealer fall in love, they marry, and finally try to modernize the family farm. When Germany invades Poland, the Soviet Union is given no culpability in this anti-Polish propaganda piece. Corrado played two different small roles in the film, one part as a bit player (an officer), another as an extra (a peasant at a party).⁷¹

One particularly interesting role that Corrado played on screen was an Italian prisoner of war in *Escape in the Desert*. The new acting roles that opened up because of the war such as Italian enemy soldier or villainous Axis collaborator must have been

⁷⁰ Mieczysław B. Biskupski, *Hollywood's War with Poland, 1939-1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 59-63.

⁷¹ Biskupski, *Hollywood's War with Poland, 1939-1945*, 87.

somewhat demeaning, especially with the threat of becoming typecast in such roles and being remembered by the Italian community for such negative portrayals.

With the war effort in full-swing, Hollywood was becoming deserted. What jobs were available were quickly filled by any remaining actors. For directors, producers, and writers (many of them being emigres) this film personnel shortage would also be a blessing in disguise. And as John Houseman explained: “With so many filmmakers in uniform—some in active service but most of them working on training and indoctrination films...those that remained were actively employed.”⁷²

Corrado would go on to appear in at least a dozen of the era’s finest World War II propaganda feature films. He played a waiter in some of these movies, such as in *Casablanca* where he can be seen in the background of Rick’s Café Americain in much of the film. However, a brief summary of the plots of these productions show that Corrado accepted at least a couple of roles as enemy Italians. This compilation of his wartime films amazingly covers the war from almost every military front possible.

In another film, *Fall In*, the plot revolved around the issue of domestic security regarding enemy aliens. This film’s message would have been alarming to some foreign actors living in Hollywood as the story involved German actors in the Hollywood movie colony. These actors, as the story goes, set up a bar for servicemen which is bugged with listening devices. The date when the film was released (1942) coincides with the opening

⁷² John Houseman, *Front and Center* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 118. For an analysis of the Italianess and content of Capra’s *Why We Fight* series see Jonathan J. Cavallero, *Hollywood’s Italian American Filmmakers: Capra, Scorsese, Savoca, Coppola, and Tarantino* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

of the Hollywood Canteen, a free nightclub for servicemen on Sunset Boulevard staffed by Hollywood actors.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FOREVER TYPED:

TEMPORARY ROAD MAPS OF EXTRAS, BIT PLAYERS, AND LEADS

Corrado had small parts in big films and 1939 saw him in the industry's most highly awarded films. This would contrast to B-movie actors who often had big parts in films that were not widely distributed. The 1939 movie season theatergoer would have spotted Corrado playing an Italian barber cutting actor James Stewart's hair in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, a French Foreign Legion recruit alongside Gary Cooper in *Beau Geste*, and a French waiter who serves Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara (Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh) in *Gone With the Wind*.



Figure 9. In interview many years later, Corrado remembered that he was asked to set the table for the *Gone with the Wind* restaurant scene because the director wanted it “European style.”¹

¹ Bill Cappello. “The Search for Gino Corrado,” *The 3 Stooges Journal* (58, Summer 1991): 7.

Corrado's filmography is even more astounding if one considers that he worked as an extra (although unconfirmed) in another film of the same year, *The Wizard of Oz*. This is indeed possible in view of the fact that Corrado played on the set of two other MGM films shot at the Culver City studio: *Gone with the Wind* and *Lady of the Tropics*. Since the scheduled dates for filming of the three pictures overlapped, Corrado could have merely stepped to the other side of the MGM lot to earn a few extra dollars. Directors George Cukor and Victor Fleming both worked on *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*. But it was Mervyn LeRoy who made the casting decisions regarding the 600 actors used in *The Wizard of Oz*. Whether Gino Corrado appeared in the *Wizard of Oz* is something of a debate. Actor and author Mike Bacarella was confident enough to have included the *Wizard of Oz* in Corrado's filmography for his book on Italian actors.² Corrado's part would have been in the Emerald City sequence which would have made him one of the 300 extras paid \$44 for working three days. Extras were often in demand, sometimes there would be as few as 20 and as many as 100 hopeful actors patiently waiting in an alley outside the MGM casting department. In *The Making of the Wizard of Oz* author Aljean Hametz writes of how the extras "were hired to fill the backgrounds on the immense sound stages. Occasionally, for a big costume film, all of them would be given work." She sadly concluded... "But if they expected to become stars, no one ever

² Michael Bacarella, *Italactors* (Washington, D.C.: National Italian American Foundation, 2002), 54-55. In an email discussion with the author, Bacarella believes that there is a character with the spitting image of Corrado in the Emerald City scene. I think it also likely that the individual in costume was possibly one of Corrado's brothers who were also actors. Also, Corrado may not appear on any call sheets because of the number of extras used in the production.

did.”³

Related to this issue, an executive secretary from the Screen Actors Guild wrote in its monthly membership magazine, “It has been computed that not more than one extra in ten million has ever achieved stardom.” Relating to how older actors of Corrado’s status received preference over extras, he added, “Exceedingly few ever attain even to a bit part to earn a few pennies, and producers would rather hire an experienced actor—perhaps a former star—down on his luck than an untried extra.”⁴ When an anonymous bit player wrote to the magazine the following month to concur with this opinion, Corrado was one of 65 of Hollywood’s best known bit players who collectively signed a response letter asserting that extras were only given one or two chances to give their lines; failure to do so meant that the part was handed to someone else. “An extra stepping in and reading lines that a bit man has failed on is not an unusual occurrence, and we refer you to any assistant director,” the letter read.⁵ Corrado, of course, thought that if any actors blocked the aspirations of other actors it was *lead actors*. “Some big shot,” he would later give as an example, would not bother to learn his or her lines and often blame bit players.⁶

What was Corrado’s official status as an actor? According to the Screen Actors

³ Aljean Harmetz, *The Making of the Wizard of Oz* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 134.

⁴ *Screen Actor*, September 1940, 2.

⁵ *Screen Actor*, November 1940, 2.

⁶ Gino Corrado interview with Bill Cappello. Van Nuys, CA, 4 May 1976. Tape 1.

Guild classification, Corrado was a Class A member, or skilled actor, but also did Class B work, considered unskilled. By 1940, the latter group (extras) comprised the majority of the guild membership at about 75 percent and was thought to be dependent on other means of livelihood besides movie work.⁷

A consideration of Corrado's acting style in the thirties, and in particular, the first three years after the introduction of sound may explain why he had a hard time finding work for a several years. Gesticulations, bowing, and pantomiming still characterized Corrado's acting in this early talkie period. He must have found difficulty as an accomplished silent film actor trained in a bygone day—an Italian one at that—to act with less dramaticism of the body. Even up to the mid-thirties, as in the Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire film *Top Hat* (1935), Corrado still displayed some of the effects of the years of silent film training that defined his craft.

Corrado also had experience in comedy during the silent days and several roles he played were stereotypical, comedic Latin personalities. One of the earliest was in *Dr. Rhythm* (1939) playing an Italian named Cazzatta who chases Bing Crosby around. As it was very effective, this character would be recycled and repeated in several shorts and features with some variation. In *Pest from the West* (1939), Corrado plays a well-dressed Spanish gentleman who similarly duels with Buster Keaton at the end of the short film.

Corrado created for himself the character of “a raving mad Italian man wielding a sword,” and he played it well. This part usually entailed angrily yelling with his thick

⁷ “Film Extras Fight for Vote,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 June 1940, A3.

accent or in Italian, flailing of the arms, and lots of running. Wielding a sword with remarkable confidence was a skill that Corrado had picked up through working in films such as the *Iron Mask*, which required considerable swordplay.

Corrado played in the Three Stooges shorts *Hoi Polloi* (1935), *Saved by the Belle* (1939), *An Ache in Every Stake* (1941) and *Micro-phonies* (1945). It is probably in the second film mentioned, where Corrado plays a waiter in the opening scene, where he may have impressed someone with his resume containing comedic experience to land a future role. The latter two which feature Corrado, are among the most popular Three Stooges shorts, according to their fans. *An Ache in Every Stake* has Corrado cast as a French chef who speaks in broken English, however when the lines were spoken in Corrado's accent, the character took on a purely Italian quality:

[scene 43]

That settles me!! She is the last strawstack....but before I go—

He throws the knife in the direction of the three boys who are now back against the wall under a shelf.⁸

In the Three Stooges short *Micro-phonies* (1945), Corrado played the “villain,” an opera singer named Signor Spumoni, who is so antagonized by the antics of the Three Stooges that he chases them with a sword. A reminder that physical comedy can actually be dangerous occurred during one of the chase scenes, where Corrado fell (as was

⁸ Three Stooges, *An Ache in Every Stake*. Columbia Studios final script, 21 August 1940. Jules White Collection, Margaret Herrick Library.

scripted) but twisted his wrist.⁹ The script best captures the comical elements intended for Corrado's part:

Scene 26

Int. Studio 'A' - Full Shot.

An illuminated sign says 'On the Air--Quiet' A temperamental Italian violinist, Spumoni, is playing a violin solo with piano accompaniment. The boys burst in like a tornado, with Dugan yelling as he chases them. The boys split up, Larry goes around Spumoni and the microphone, and Curly crawls under the piano. The razzle-dazzle confuses the boss, and he charges around like a wild bull.

Scene 27

Close Shot—Spumoni

He tries to carry on with his fiddling, but the uproar is too much, and he begins tearing his hair and screaming in Italian.

Scene 34

Med. Shot

Spumoni smashes the fiddle (breakaway) over Moe's head. He then seizes a sword from the table of props and begins swinging wildly. One of his swipes with the sword just misses Curly's back, cutting holes in the seat of his pants. The attack intimidates the Stooges and they dash out of Studio 'A' with Spumoni in hot pursuit.

Scene 61

Two shots—Mrs. Bixby and Spumoni.

⁹ Cappello, 8.

Spumoni (emotionally)

I am sorry I am late, Mrs. Bixby! I meeta the crazy peep! They busta my glasses! Mrs. Bixby, please excuse I can no play the fiddle. I sing, instead, no? ¹⁰

In *Honeymoon Blues* (1946), Corrado again plays the crazed Italian, this time as jealous swordsman Bruno who chases actor Hugh Herbert. Though he only appeared in a handful of short films, Corrado's parts were bigger in this period, and, more importantly, he was credited on the screen for these comedic roles.

Motion picture audiences saw a lot of Corrado in the early 1940s. Sophisticated movie-going audiences would have been cued by a restaurant or nightclub scene, at least subconsciously, to expect Corrado's image on the screen. So often did Corrado play this part that it became his signature role. In fact, even today, when one thinks of a waiter, it is usually Corrado's dark-haired and pencil mustachioed image that comes to mind.¹¹

What worked for the audience did not always work for the director or producer, at least in one documented case. Orson Welles had purposely cast unknown actors from his Mercury Theater troupe for his production of *Citizen Kane*, a film about William Randolph Hearst produced by Warner Brothers. In a later interview about the production, Welles angrily recounted how one "famous" actor did accidentally slip into the picture:

¹⁰ Three Stooges, *Micro-Phonies*. Columbia Studios final script, 20 April 1945. Jules White Collection, Margaret Herrick Library.

¹¹ It was possible for a movie-goer to have seen Corrado as a waiter in all the studio's three or four films playing in any small town. Several recent TV shows and movies feature a waiter that likely is based off Corrado's image. This includes the chef in the newest *Three Stooges* movie (2012) and a chef (in addition to the show's stock Luigi character) that appears sporadically in *The Simpsons* animated series.

My whole idea of having only new faces was ruined by the first day of shooting which was as I said, the first several days when we pretended to be testing but were actually shooting the picture. The scene was in the nightclub with Susan when she grows old. For the waiter in that nightclub, casting sent me a tubby little round-faced Italian [Gino Corrado] who is the waiter in every movie ever made! And I couldn't possibly send him away on the basis that he was too well-known a face because I was claiming to be testing. So there he is—spoiling the whole master plan in one of the first shots that I made! ¹²

Welles's comment about Corrado being the waiter in every movie ever made was not too far off the mark. In the year before *Citizen Kane* was released, ten films were nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards held at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. Corrado appeared in half of them: *Foreign Correspondent*, *The Great Dictator*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Kitty Foyle*, and the year's winner, *Rebecca*. However, the small scene in which Corrado plays in *Citizen Kane* is quite memorable. Interestingly, Corrado's character was called "Gino" in the film; what appears to be an homage is perhaps only an inside joke by director Welles. The scene is a fantastic example of Welles's talent as a director with his use of lighting, actor direction, and camera angles. *Citizen Kane* is the most studied film in the classroom and this scene sets the tone for the rest of the film. (The movie's only Oscar in 1941 was for Best Writing, Original Screenplay). The opening scene in the Cabaret El Rancho captures Kane's wife after her downfall, and sitting on a stool she hysterically screams that she wants to be left alone: Thompson looks up at the Captain. The Captain indicates the door with a slight jerk of his head, then walks away from the table toward a waiter who is leaning against the wall in front of the door.

Thompson follows.

¹² Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles* (New York: Da Capo Press, Revised Ed. 1998), 71.

Captain

“Gino—get her another highball.”

(to Thompson as he passes them)

“She’s just not talking to anybody, Mr. Thompson.”

Thompson

“Okay”

(walks to the phone booth)

Waiter

“Another double?”

Captain

“Yeah...”¹³

The irony of Corrado acting in the scene is that he almost always appeared in films that had elegant nightclubs, but in this unusual instance he depicts a bartender in a down-and-out cabaret. The setting is also an unlikely place to start an allegorical film about newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst whose influence by Mussolini was also reflected in his newspapers. Mussolini, an experienced journalist, personally wrote articles for Hearst papers on subjects ranging from how to deal with the menace of communism to how to get rid of gangsters.¹⁴

¹³ Pauline Kael, Herman J. Mankiewicz, and Orson Welles, *The Citizen Kane Book: Raising Kane and the Shooting Script* (New York: Bantam, 1974).

¹⁴ Louis Pizzitola, *Hearst over Hollywood: Power, Passion, and Propaganda in the Movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 263-264.

Hearst was angry at Orson Welles' unflattering portrayal of him in *Citizen Kane*. The film was kept out of Hearst-owned theaters and received no mention in his newspapers. Though it lost money upon initial release, today many consider *Citizen Kane* to be the best movie ever made. Hearst's opportunity for reprisal came during the release of another Warner Brothers picture, the overtly pro-Soviet film *Mission to Moscow* in 1943. Hearst's newspapers slammed the film as red propaganda for its sympathetic portrait of Stalin and the Soviet Union. Gino Corrado appears in *Mission to Moscow*, uncredited. Though difficult to spot, he is in a key scene where Hailie Selasie, the exiled leader of Ethiopia, gives a rousing speech against fascist Italy in front of the League of Nations, causing the Italian delegates to walk out en masse. Years later at the height of the Cold War, *Mission to Moscow* would again stir up controversy. In a later article, Dwight MacDonald, writing for *Partisan Review*, wrote a statement that was to serve as an indictment against the studio: "With the film Warner Brothers have produced in this country the first full-dress example of the kind of propaganda movie confined to the totalitarian countries. It is our considered opinion that *Mission to Moscow* falsifies history and glorifies dictatorship."¹⁵

On the home front, Corrado was suffering sadness due to the loss of his spouse. In 1943, Gino Corrado's wife Zella passed away of natural causes. She was buried at Forrest Lawn in Glendale with the Italian inscription on her head stone, "Cara Mia" (my beloved). Corrado eventually became very depressed. Sometime afterwards, a young

¹⁵ David Culbert, *Mission to Moscow* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 257-259.

woman, a radio actress and musician—but who was an aspiring movie actress—was touring Hollywood with her sister (who was also an actress and a writer), and their mother. As fans of silent films, they decided to look up an actor whom they had never met, but had known from the screen. They surprised themselves when they easily found him: Corrado was listed in the phone book (as Gino Corrado) and they went to his address and recognized him as he walked on the street in front of his house. Corrado was given a boost of confidence by the girl and her sister who praised him. Young, impressionable, and wanting to further her career, the twenty-something-year-old hopeful actress, whose name was Donnie Macciche, accepted an invitation to dinner for later that evening from the veteran actor. The meeting only lasted one night, with Corrado, who was twice the girl's age, cooking her dinner at his home. To the girl's amazement, unlike the elegant fare he served on-screen, dinner was a can of spaghetti heated up on the stove—probably Chef Boyardee brand. Corrado proceeded to ask the young girl to marry him. Though flattered, she declined, concerned about their age difference.¹⁶

Corrado had other family members residing in Southern California, but it is not known how the war affected them, with the exception of Louis. Corrado's brothers, both American citizens since birth, lived in Alhambra and Beverly Hills, with their mother, Catarina, living with Louis since about 1915. Catarina, like many Italians, became a

¹⁶ Interview via telephone with Donnie Macchiche (Reno, Nevada), circa 26 June 2006. Macciche estimates the year she met Corrado to be toward the end of the war. For more information on her, see Erin Breen, "Ambition still strong in Multi-Talented Macciche," *Reno Gazette-Journal*, 25 April 2005. Corrado's wife, Zella (Sorenson) Liserani died on 27 November 1943 according to California Birth Index (accessed online).

naturalized citizen when faced with the possibility of war and deportation. Corrado's father, Carlo, and Catarina seemed to have separated around 1912, with the census reporter listing Carlo as a "widower." In the 1930s, Carlo worked as a building contractor in Santa Susana. A faraway farming and ranching community in Ventura County, Santa Susana was better known in Corrado's Hollywood circle for its scenic sandstone hills used by western film location sets and being adjacent to Box Canyon where Douglas Fairbanks had a hunting cabin.¹⁷ By 1940 the 71-year-old Carlo was still married yet lived alone, renting a room in an apartment near Echo Park Lake and working as an interior decorator.¹⁸ He had maintained his Italian nationality and would have had his curfew and travel limited during the first years of the war.

Many of the international studios themselves suffered disruptions because of the war. Gaumont studio in London gave lodging on the premises to several of its employees who experienced transportation hardships during London's frequent air raids. The huge modern studio complex of Cinecittà in Rome ceased producing films when at war's end it was turned into an administrative center for Jewish refugees where a nursery and synagogue were established, and a few years later the former-studio housed 1,800

¹⁷ For information on Carlo Liserani's work with People's Lumber Company, see *Oxnard Daily Courier* 2 November 1935, 8, and also *Oxnard Daily Courier* 29 January 1936, 2.

¹⁸ 1940 Federal Population Census. Los Angeles. Carlo Liserani was a lodger at 1818 Montrose Place.

Displaced Persons—mostly Jewish—and it was the Italian headquarters of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews.¹⁹

Hal Roach Studio in Culver City was converted into a headquarters for the motion picture unit of the United States armed forces. With the war's end the studio was put up for sale, with one prospective buyer (another Hollywood production studio) offering 1.5 million dollars for "Fort Roach" but not before their attorney requested "some provision in the deal that if the Army's leaving the premises of your studio equipment, buildings or any other items are materially removed or dismantled, this would be further reason for discussing an adjustment in the total price."²⁰

The war gave financial concerns to the many restaurants in Hollywood. Sugar was rationed and often hampered bakers from making their pastries. Fruits, coffee, wheat, meat, and dairy become the material of shortages and were rationed. One Hollywood chef, who considered himself a culinary artist, grew so depressed by continuous shortages that he committed suicide by inhaling car exhaust in his garage.²¹ Some restaurant owners that used too many ration points found it necessary to simply close up shop and go on

¹⁹ United States Holocaust Museum. Online exhibit.
<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/dp/camp2b.htm>

²⁰ American Film Institute, Louis B. Mayer Library, Special Collections. Leo McCarey Collection, Box 7; File "Leo McCarey Correspondence Tax from Earl Rettig circa 1946." See also Nigel Ostrer, *The Ostrers and Gaumont British* (Lulu, 2010), 280.

²¹ "Food Rationing Cramps Style, So Chef Kills Himself," *Los Angeles Times* 11 May 1943, 6. The chef's name was Joseph Kasten.

vacation in order to save what stocks they had remaining.²² Occasionally, those deemed the caretakers of the coveted rationed foodstuffs could not resist the temptation to sell any extra items at a hefty profit on the black market, as was the situation in a publicized case of an accused Brown Derby chief steward in July of 1943.²³

After the war, with no shortages, as troops returned home and the baby boom began, the catering industry saw spectacular growth. In 1941, the catering industry had employed about 600,000 workers. By 1946, the industry became America's second largest service trade worth \$12 billion and by years end could count 402,000 union members alone. By 1948 over 1.7 million people worked in America's eating and drinking places and hotels.²⁴

Interestingly, even Vittorio Mussolini had shelved his dreams of making movies and became involved in the food industry after suffering exile to Argentina. He operated a series of small restaurants in Buenos Aires.²⁵ Although he never returned to the high-profile work of moviemaking, the young Mussolini and the fascist government had actually laid much of the infrastructure that helped boost the ailing industry, primarily

²² Letter from Bill Schiela sent to Adam (an army private stationed in Okinawa), dated 10 July 1943. In the author's possession. The letter-writer was in Milwaukee and worked at Isle of Cyprus restaurant that closed for two weeks.

²³ "Meat Case: Accused Man in Brown Derby Probe," *Los Angeles Evening Herald-Express*, 2 July 1943, 1. The accused chief steward was Covert L. Goodlove.

²⁴ *The Catering Industry Employee*, Volume 51, No. 1 (January 1941), 42.

Matthew Johnson, *Union House, Union Bar*, p. 308-310.

²⁵ *Variety*, 4 August 1997. Publicity Files at AMPAS.

with Cinecittà, the Centro Sperimentale (the experimental film center in Rome which pioneered Neo-Realism) and the magazine *Bianco e Nero*, subsidizing filmmakers, stabilizing movie ticket prices, freezing foreign currency, the studying of international film techniques, his critical magazine *Cinema*, and he and his father's drive to oust America from the dominance of movies in Italy, which sadly only was realized with the war that forced Italians to supply productions for their own screens.

After World War II, Italy became a massive film industry second only to the United States.²⁶ Many of the Experimental Film Center's trained directors went on to enjoy noteworthy success as Italy became Europe's only successful international film industry. Beginning with *Open City* in 1946, which ran 21 consecutive months in New York City (longer than *Gone with the Wind* or *The Birth of a Nation*), production exploded after Italo-American agreements in the late 1940s and early 1950 that saw the production of Old World genre films like the remake of *Quo Vadis?* along with contemporary romantic travelogues. Through the success of its imports, the Italian film industry employed 67,000 people by 1951 and Cinecittà became the most influential industrial film plant in Europe.²⁷

²⁶ Mary Ann McDonald Carolan, *Transatlantic Gaze: Italian Cinema, American Film* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 2014), 12. See also *Time*, "Show Business—Rome's New Empire," 14 July 1952, 86.

²⁷ E. Giannelli, "Economical Development" in Luigi Malerba (ed), *Italian Cinema, 1945-1951* (Rome: Edizioni D'arte Carlo Bestetti, 1951), 82, 85. See also Tino Balio, "The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens 1946-1973," Lecture (highlights from his book), 18 March 2013, Linwood Dunn Theater, Hollywood (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences).

The American film industry's new business model was hiring a director and a few American stars, then going overseas for the cheaper labor of extras, set builders, and backgrounds. With an income tax clause that let actors avoid taxes if they lived abroad for 18 months, over 100 American actors worked in Italy from 1946 to 1950, many of which Corrado would have known: Paul Muni, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Burt Lancaster, Edward G. Robinson, Orson Welles, and George Raft. With Hollywood in decline, "runaway production" was criticized by organizations such as the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Labor's Hollywood Council. Defending runaway production was Walter Wanger, who had earlier proposed a film venture to Mussolini during the fascist era, who used the argument that new and interesting backgrounds were good for the box office and thus the overall profitability of the film business.²⁸

Italy quickly became Europe's major film destination. Cinecittà had resumed its place to become Europe's premiere soundstage where the "tram of the stars" carried actors to the outlying studio at the edge of Rome. The Via Veneto, a strip only two blocks long, was Rome's social center for American movie actors where they lunched at the cafes or strolled in their fashionable attire in front of the paparazzi. So frequent were the international movies production and so popular were Italian stars in America that two

²⁸ Robert R. Shandley, *Runaway Romances: Hollywood's Postwar Tour of Europe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 17. See also Guidarino Guidi "Foreign directors, actors and actresses in Italy since 1945," in Malerba (ed), *Italian Cinema, 1945-1951*, 96.

Hollywood movie magazine correspondents opened a talent agency, known as Kaufman-Lerner Associates, for both Italian and American actors in Rome.²⁹

Actors, producers, and directors that travelled to the Italian capital were anxious to learn the language. According to one Italian teacher, an immigrant from the Abruzzo region, many in filmdom took classes given by him at Hollywood High School's Night School once they received contracts or had deals to work in Europe. One such contract was given to lead actress Jane Powell who also needed to know Italian for songs she would be singing.³⁰

There was a small colony of American actors living in Rome that had found themselves blacklisted after the war for alleged communist activity. One actor who claimed he had been denied acting jobs in Hollywood for a year, studied Italian under the G.I. Bill and became a dialogue director in Rome helping Italian supporting actors pronounce their English lines and memorize them, as only two or three of the leads in a film were American and spoke English. The largest communities of blacklistees were in Britain and France, but Rome had a small fluid population of a dozen or so, partly

²⁹ Hank Kaufman and Gene Lerner, *Hollywood Sul Tuvere* (Milan: Sperling and Kupfer, 1980), 23-25. See also Mickey Knox, *The Good, the Bad, and the Dolce Vita: The Adventures of an Actor in Hollywood, Paris, and Rome* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), 106.

³⁰ Frances A. De Sanctis, *Odyssey from Rosciolo, Italy to Hollywood, California* (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing, 2000), 148.

because of Italian director Dino De Laurentiis's willingness to use blacklisted screenwriters on his projects.³¹

Corrado never worked in the "Hollywood on the Tiber," as columnists were calling Rome. Whether Corrado visited Italy after the war is unlikely, but he did play a servant in *Three Coins in a Fountain* that was filmed primarily in Italy, though he probably appeared in the interior shots done in Hollywood. Just before the war was over, Corrado settled down in a new growing area of Los Angeles that attracted thousands of film workers. But unforeseen circumstances would temporarily turn his life and movie career upside down.

³¹ Rebecca Prime, *Hollywood Exiles in Europe: The Blacklist and Cold War Film Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 5, 49. Knox, *The Good, the Bad, and the Dolce Vita*, 99, 108.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“NEVER MORE ROAM”:

FOLLOWING THE CAREER PATH OF MOVIE WORKERS TO THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

Though working in Hollywood, Corrado had moved away from the area and had been living in Sherman Oaks since at least 1944.¹ This area of the San Fernando Valley in northern Los Angeles had a strong cinematic history tied to Hollywood. The nearby town of Lankershim had annexed itself to Los Angeles and soon after, in 1927, realtors voted to change its name to “North Hollywood”—despite not actually bordering Hollywood—to capitalize on the international fame of the movie-making capital.

Studio City, a few miles further into the Valley, was developed by the Central Motion Picture District to attract film studios—as well the industry’s workers— starting in 1928. With the bulk of the work completed a year later, the papers announced the anchoring of movie studios as key to permanent growth in the area making “Studio City-Ventura Boulevard—Sherman Oaks [...] one of the most prosperous in the country.”² The construction of sidewalks and the widening of roads by the organization included Ventura Boulevard all the way to Sherman Oaks. The excitement would not have gone

¹ Correspondence to Corrado from Republic Studios in December 1944 has his Sherman Oaks address listed. GCC.

² “Studio City Shows Action,” *Los Angeles Times* 24 February 1929, E6.

unnoticed by Corrado as the organization was quick to promote the location to film workers with a forty-foot road sign that read “This is Studio City” alongside an information booth with maps and details about the massive development.³

One of the key promoters of Studio City, and Vice-President of its Central Motion Picture District syndicate, was Harry H. Merrick, an attorney and real estate broker.⁴ He had first begun his foray into Valley real estate with the Hollywood Manor subdivision in the Cahuenga Valley just opposite Universal City, and would continue promoting land west through Studio City into Sherman Oaks, and a few miles past the city’s limits on Ventura Boulevard. As a partner of the Merrick-Ruddick Realty Corporation, his firm sold property in the area alongside Ventura Boulevard where they developed and subdivided much of the land in Studio City. The realty group advertised in newspapers and with brochures where Studio City was anticipated as becoming the “producing center of the industry.”⁵

Merrick’s involvement in the development of Studio City actually began years earlier with property of the Hollywood Country Club.⁶ The opening of the club followed

³ “New Studio City Youngest American Community Ever To Be Given Post Office” *Los Angeles Times* 19 February 1928, E4. For the Studio City signage, see original (circa 1929) 8 by 10 inch promotional photograph (presumably commissioned by Mack Sennett) in the author’s possession.

⁴ There is no mention of Merrick practicing law in California, but he was listed in the 1900 United States Federal Census (living in St. Paul, Minnesota with the occupation of an attorney) and in the 1930 Census, while living in Los Angeles as working in Civil Court.

⁵ Advertisement, *Van Nuys News*, 30 September 1927, 12.

⁶ Matthew William Roth, “Concrete Utopia: The Development of Roads and Freeways in Los Angeles, 1910-1950” (Ph.D Diss. University of Southern California, 2007), 216. Merrick was the

a general trend in America with the explosion of wealth which climaxed in 1927 with 5,500 country clubs and 2.7 million members before sharply declining during the Depression.⁷ With ample open land and proximity to the city, a dozen clubs opened in the San Fernando Valley. Just south of Coldwater Canyon and Ventura Boulevard, and not geographically contiguous to Hollywood proper, the club opened in 1922. Merrick was elected the club's second president. Before coming to Los Angeles, Merrick had been the president of the South Shore Country Club near Chicago's Hyde Park, where coveted memberships sold for \$200 (later \$400) and a roster of 2,000 names included most of the wealthiest men of the city.⁸ A membership list was an indicator of social power, and the Hollywood Country Club, though not displaying the same well-to-do roster as Merrick's previous Chicago club, aimed to be "composed of the very elite in Hollywood and Los Angeles" according to the club's membership campaign secretary. Hollywood Country Club attracted several prominent members with Douglas Fairbanks, treasurer, and Cecil B. DeMille, vice-president, who were also members of various other country clubs. Edgar Rice Burroughs (the creator of Tarzan) was also a member, and he and Merrick were also two of the three vice presidents at nearby El Caballero Country Club in Tarzana where Merrick represented Burroughs's land surrounding that club as well.⁹

⁷ James M. Mayo, *The American Country Club: Its Origins and Development* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 156-159.

⁸ "Hepworth Slate Accepts Battle at South Shore," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 October 1917, 15.

⁹ "Club is Incorporated," *Holly Leaves*, Vol. 8, No. 5 (16 August 1919): 12. Along with Fairbanks and DeMille, John Fairbanks—Douglas's brother—was also a vice president when the club first wrote their articles of incorporation in 1919. John Taliaferro, *Tarzan Forever: The Life of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Creator of Tarzan* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 200. El Caballero Country Club lacked membership and

Many lead actors joined country clubs but character actors or bit players, like Corrado, probably found it too expensive to buy a membership. In 1921, for example, the application fee for regular membership at Hollywood Country Club was \$500 with yearly dues set at \$100.¹⁰ As a working actor, Corrado made about \$100 a week for only about 12 to 20 weeks per year until the late 1920s when his standard rate jumped to \$250 a week. The latter pay was certainly a good living but arguably not the typical salary of a blue-blooded clubsman; though it is plausible, yet still unlikely, that Corrado may have bought a membership as a way to gain influence with studio directors who were members. Only Corrado's brother Luis was connected to a country club, and that was for a short duration in the late 1920s as the head steward at Midwick Country Club in Alhambra. If Corrado went to country clubs at all, it was more likely as an invited guest by some of his actor friends, such as Ramon Navarro, or with his work parties, or through some of his Italian contacts, perhaps Joe Santori, who was the president of the Los Angeles Country Club.

Country clubs greatly influenced land development and some attracted speculators such as the Girard Country Club. Located at the far edge of the Valley near Ventura and Topanga Canyon boulevards, about 18 miles from Los Angeles in what is today Woodland Hills, the Girard Country Club was perhaps the best example of real

received insufficient revenue from dues in 1928, prompting the sale of the club. "Rex Goodcell Heads El Caballero Club," *Van Nuys News*, 30 January 1925, 7.

¹⁰ Leter, dated 3 February 1921, from Emory C. Brace, Vice-Chairman of the Membership Committee, sent to J.S. Marquard, Chemical Supply Co., Los Angeles. An attached application shows membership prices. In the author's possession.

estate schemes of this kind. Buyers received a free membership (“full privileges”) to the club with the purchase of a “mountain lodge,” priced at \$1,450 in 1926. Victor Girard, the promoter of the subdivision, and an associate of Merrick at one time, sold many lots this way before he was arrested for various charges of fraud and the golf course was made public.¹¹ A writer for the Universal Studios employee magazine made a joke at the expense of speculators when he wrote about the First Annual Golf Tournament for employees held at the Girard Golf Club in 1929 (just before it became the Woodland Hills Country Club): “We understand that they are going to take all the divots that are dug up by the contestants, put them side by side and start a sub-division.”¹²

Some developers looked west of Hollywood, and subdivided towards the ocean as was with the Wilshire Country Club. Hollywood’s biggest developer, Charles E. Toberman, took this route through the bean fields alongside Wilshire Boulevard. He was a founder of the Wilshire Country Club, a member-owned country club that was attached to a company that sold stock which entitled individuals to own shares in both the property and the club. When membership numbers were low or there was an immediate need in paying creditors, clubs sometimes were forced to sell lands that had been reserved for

¹¹ Advertisement, *Van Nuys News*, 21 December 1929, 5. The advertisement claimed that a club membership in Southern California would cost two or three times what a mountain lodge with full privileges to the Girard Country Club and Golf Club would be. Merrick and Girard collaborated on several projects, including the Mulholland Skyline Highway, the Ventura Boulevard Chamber of Commerce, and Hollywood Foothills Association. See “Ventura Blvd. Chamber to Celebrate on Oct. 29,” *Van Nuys News*, 23 October 1925, 5. “Plans Maturing for Mulholland Drive,” *Van Nuys News*, 27 February 1923, 1.

¹² Albert De Mond, “All Overs,” *Universal City Club Bulletin*, August 1929, 10.

future club or golf course expansion.¹³ This may be the case of Hollywood Country Club which subdivided and offered adjacent parcels first to its members before putting them on the open market.

Merrick was the realtor and developer of the former Hollywood Country Club lands. The possibility exists that the subdivision was part of a larger plan that started when Merrick became the president of the Hollywood Foothills Association, a group of real estate owners and civic leaders that helped push through the construction of connector roads from Beverly Hills and Hollywood into the Valley. Calling a joint meeting between the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce and the newly-formed Ventura Boulevard Chamber of Commerce in 1923, Merrick cemented an alliance between the two organizations with the shared goals of creating new traffic arteries, supporting the growth of the motion picture industry, and improving the Cahuenga Pass Highway between the two communities.¹⁴ That same year, Merrick bought the Hollywood Foothills property, approximately 407 acres, in what is today Sherman Oaks, from the same owner as the Hollywood Country Club. One of the first roads built into the center of the development was Dixie Canyon.¹⁵

¹³ James M. Mayo, *The American Country Club: Its Origins and Development* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 154,159.

¹⁴ "Business Men of Northwest from Alliance," *Los Angeles Times* 11 May 1927, A7.

¹⁵ Subdivisions and Subdividers," *Los Angeles Times* 8 June 1924, D3. The Dixie Canyon road was built in the late summer of 1924. See also Roth, "Concrete Utopia", 216-217.

The Hollywood Country Club was “Hollywood” in name only, and this naming followed a trend of cities, clubs, and restaurants in the 1920s using the name Hollywood to denote glamour, excitement, and modernity. Civic leaders in several dozen cities deliberated changing, or ultimately changed, their town’s name to Hollywood. Besides North Hollywood, other communities used the name including Hollywood, Florida—a decision by a developer that had worked in southern California and was fascinated with the film capital. Several developments also took the name Hollywood. A development in Burbank was originally planned to be named Hollywood Riviera but gave up the name in the late 1920s to a grander 604-acre subdivision south of Los Angeles that encompassed parts of Torrance and Redondo Beach (where purchasers became life members of the private Hollywood Riviera Beach Club).¹⁶

Much of the copycat naming was not welcomed in Hollywood. This was especially true when Culver City civic leaders toyed with the idea of renaming itself Hollywood to rival the real Hollywood and to attract attention to the number of film studios already operating within its borders in the late 1930s. Being only ten miles from Hollywood, the Hollywood Country Club name was a ploy to gain the attention of potential members who worked in the film industry. Though the Hollywood Country Club properties were “restricted” to white buyers only, which included Jews, the Hollywood Riviera preferred anti-Semitic policies that compromised their goal of

¹⁶ Frank McCleunan Keffer., Harold McLean Meier, and Arthur Hamilton Cawston. *History of San Fernando Valley* (Glendale, Calif: Stillman Print. Co, 1934), 289. Hollywood Riviera subdivision sales suffered because of the Depression and some houses went up for auction, such as the opulent home at 144 Camino de Las Colinas. See *Los Angeles Times* 26 February 1939, 8.

attracting the motion picture's wealthiest tycoons to build their palaces on the bluff overlooking the ocean.¹⁷

Merrick promoted both the Hollywood Country Club development and the Hollywood Foothills for the next several years. Beautiful stone-lithographed color brochures created by the George Kistler Studio of Lithography in Los Angeles showed illustrated maps and promoted the properties as "sixteen minutes from Hollywood." "Exclusive and restricted" read the entrance sign to the Country Club subdivision, and realtors exaggerated the climate, claiming the hillside area had a delightful summer unlike the Valley floor, all of which made the Ventura Boulevard district the logical spot for the area's finer homes.¹⁸ Merrick had sales offices in Hollywood, one on Western and another on Hollywood Boulevard, which probably displayed graphic window signs with slogans leveled at movie workers with money: "Waiting for you—that California Home."¹⁹

Merrick sold the Hollywood Foothills property upon the announcement of the building of Studio City soundstages, and the chain of sale is remarkable in that land prices had skyrocketed so quickly. In 1912 Moses Hazeltine Sherman had acquired the 402-acre property for \$15,200. In 1920, he sold the property to C.R. Holt who was

¹⁷ Bruce L. Megowan and Maureen D. Megowan, *Historic Tales from Palos Verdes and the South Bay* (Charleston: The History Press, 2014), 126.

¹⁸ "Make Progress in Hills Along State Highway," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 February 1923, V4.

¹⁹ "Brochure for Sunday-Merrick & Ruddick Realtors, advertising their housing development in the San Fernando Valley," Lynton Kistler Archives, San Fernando Valley History Digital Library, California State University, Northridge.

building the Hollywood Country Club on adjacent land (Holt's stately home became the clubhouse) for \$40,700. The following year Holt sold the land to C.M. Long for \$55,000, which was sold in 1923 to Merrick for \$176,000. Twenty houses were built and sold in the Hollywood Foothills by the end of 1924. Merrick quit the realty firm in 1925, started his own firm, and later sold the property for \$915,000 in 1927 (just after the Studio City development plan was announced).²⁰

One of the lots that Merrick-Ruddick developed was sold and a house was built later that same year that became Corrado's home in Sherman Oaks.²¹

The Hollywood Foothills development name was changed to Craighurst by its new owner and developer, Blackshear Company, one of the bigger developers in the city that had developed much of Hollywood's area including that of Paramount Studios, where Corrado had previously lived.²²

Much of the east Valley along Ventura Boulevard was developed by Hollywood-based companies. This included the many real estate brokers (in 1928, for instance, there were 408 brokers, one for every 370 Hollywood residents) and

²⁰ "Permits Show New Dwellings," *Van Nuys News*, 13 March 1925, 1. "Ventura Lots Soar," *Los Angeles Times* 29 July 1928, E6.

²¹ For information on Corrado's house lot at 4136 Dixie Canyon acquired by the realty company, see "Permit Shows New Dwellings," *Van Nuys News*, 13 March 1925, 1. The article highlights the purchase of 12 non-contiguous lots. The realty company speculated and likely wanted to subdivide and sell once their Studio City project was official, see "Roads Planned for 302-Acre Property," *Van Nuys News* 6 March 1925, 7.

²² "Foothill Tract is Sold for \$100,000," *Van Nuys News*, 11 June 1926. Blackshear bought the property for considerably more than \$100,000 as the article explains. The developer had worked around Western and Melrose for five years and sold hundreds of homes, such as Corrado's at Wilton and Melrose.

developers.²³ One such builder was Harry E. Jones. Trained as a structural engineer, Jones was briefly affiliated with the architectural firm Meyer and Holler, best known as the designers of many nationwide exotic movie theater palaces, the most famous were local: Grauman's Chinese and the Egyptian. He was instrumental in boosting Hollywood as the president of civic and industrial organizations like the Hollywood Rotary and the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, and he owned a construction company that built 600 homes in the Hollywood area. Through his research, he published a report that ranked Hollywood, population 160,000, as fourth in expenditures of construction for the four years 1926-1930, after Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland—a surprising feat as the film city was actually a community within Los Angeles.²⁴

Anticipating the need of residences for movie workers, Jones developed Hollywoodvale in North Hollywood, and was the sales representative of Studio City homes as part of the Central Motion Picture District. Citing the Valley's rezoning for a population of 1.5 million by the Regional Zoning Commission and Paramount Studio's recent acquisition of 2,766 acres (the largest contiguous studio property in the world), Jones joined an organization of a dozen other builders and realtors known as Greater San

²³ Bruce Torrence, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years* (Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, 1979), 134.

²⁴ "Obituary," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 August 1950, B6. "Boy Actor Buys Residence Site," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 November 1927, E8. Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre, Starring S. Charles Lee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 72. "Film City Wins Fourth Place," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 May 1930, D5. "Hollywood for Bond Issues," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 May 1929, A22.

Fernando Valley, Inc. for an advertising campaign blitz on the merits of living or doing business in the Valley.²⁵

Much of the development in the Valley followed the blueprint for expansion of the film industry in other areas. Championing Ventura Boulevard as the gateway to development, the Valley's developers and realtors invited Harry H. Culver, founder of Culver City and the president of the Los Angeles Realty Board, and other experienced individuals, including a representative from the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, as speakers for a banquet to share strategies on a comprehensive development plan.²⁶ Culver knew the Valley firsthand as he learned about real estate as an employee with the realty firm of Isaac N. Van Nuys in the 1910s before he formed his own company and turned his attention to his major development in the inland area east of Santa Monica. He attracted film studios by offering free land at his Culver City development location, and convinced Sennett, Ince, and Griffith to locate the first incarnation of the Triangle Pictures studio on Washington Boulevard (which would later be the home to Goldwyn and later MGM Studios), and Hal Roach to build his Roach Studios.²⁷

²⁵ San Fernando Valley Men Organize," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 January 1928, A3. "Hollywood for Bond Issues," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 May 1929, A22. The 250-acre Hollywoodvale was launched June 1926 with 800 lots and 62 buildings erected by the following year. It was centered on Moorpark and Tujunga. "Hollywoodvale to Observe Birthday," *Van Nuys News* 24 June 1927, 3. An advertisement shows Harry E. Jones as Sales Representative of Studio City homes with a sales office at Laurel Canyon and Ventura Boulevard. See *Los Angeles Times*, 21 September 1928, 4. Jones was living in Beverly Hills in 1937. "Beverly Man Freed on Bail," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 August 1937.

²⁶ "Four Hundred Fete New Ventura Blvd. C.C. Officers," *Van Nuys News*, 1 April 1927, 5.

²⁷ Stephanie Frank, "Claiming Hollywood: Boosters, the Film Industry, and Metropolitan Los Angeles," *Journal of Urban History* 38, No.1 (2012), 75.

By 1938, there were more films produced in the San Fernando Valley than in Hollywood (or Culver City, for that matter).²⁸ Besides studios located in the Valley, such as RKO, Warner Brothers, and Universal, the other studios often filmed exteriors on studio property in the Valley, such as Columbia, whose studio in Hollywood actually had no backlot for outdoor scenes so most exteriors were filmed ten miles away at Columbia Ranch in Burbank.²⁹ RKO utilized their 500-acre ranch in Encino for large standing sets and cowboy pictures.³⁰ Other productions were supplemented by forty-odd location ranches where western and action pictures were shot; most were located in the Valley, with a few out in the neighboring sparsely-populated Santa Clarita Valley. In 1939 Disney Studios relocated to Burbank and all the major studios, including MGM in Culver City, Twentieth-Century Fox in Westwood, and Paramount in Hollywood maintained property in (or just beyond) the boundaries of the San Fernando Valley.³¹

Since he arrived in Los Angeles in 1916, Corrado lived in at least 15 different residences before moving to Sherman Oaks. Some houses were those of his actor friends

²⁸ Jackson Mayers, *The San Fernando Valley* (Walnut, CA: John D. McIntyre, 1976), 154. See also "Carr Productions Locates at Mack Sennett Studio," *Van Nuys News*, 7 September 1928, 1. "Motion picture concerns having land holdings in the Valley and the Ventura boulevard area will produce 531 pictures out of a total of 780 to be made out of Los Angeles in the 1928-1929 program according to motion picture executives."

²⁹ Harry Carey, Jr. *Company of Heroes: My Life as an Actor in the John Ford Stock Company*. Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2013), 140. See also Rochelle Larkin, *Hail, Columbia* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1975), 33.

³⁰ Richard B. Jewell, *RKO Radio Pictures: A Titan is Born* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 27.

³¹ Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 93-98.

who may have rented out rooms or an entire home to him. Corrado claimed this was the case with one house that he rented from Boris Karloff, a struggling British actor in the 1920s who moved somewhat frequently until making it big in 1931 when he received a contract at Universal and moved to nearby Toluca Lake, though exactly which of his residences Corrado lived in is unknown.³²

Between February 1927 and April 1930, according to phone directories, census reports, and addresses listed on his contracts, Corrado lived at:

February 1927: 1231 Gramercy Place

August 1927: 1452 Poinsettia Place

February 1928: 2133 Holly Vista Drive

May 1928: 2312 ½ Bellevue Ave.

April 1930: 1175 N. Vermont Ave.

The residence choices, during what were the most lucrative years of his acting career, were rented-rooms or rental houses in very middle-class neighborhoods. The Gramercy Place location was an exception as the property was previously the mansion of actress Colleen Moore while Corrado worked with her on *Flaming Youth* in 1923.³³ Why Corrado needed such a massive house is unknown—he likely rented a room. The Holly Vista Drive abode, in the Hollywood Hills, was a cozy bungalow on a very small lot (1/7

³² Rhondo Steerer for www.morethanamoster.com chronicled the different residences of Boris Karloff, who moved almost once a year from 1920 until 1930. No addresses seem to match those of Corrado, but it is still plausible that the actor rented a room from him.

³³ Jeff Codori, *Colleen Moore: A Biography of the Silent Star* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 125.

of an acre) and this may be the indicator that Corrado had married and rented a single-family detached structure to start a new family. After living in several other smaller houses he moved into a newly built semi-luxurious apartment house on Vermont and Fountain, the Dryden, that opened April 1928, not far from Monogram and Fox Studio which was then located on Western and Vermont.³⁴

The years of the Depression likely made Corrado and his wife economize. In 1935 the couple moved to 1733 N. Normandie, not far from his previous apartment house. In 1937 the actor relocated to 1250 Westerly Terrace. His residence pattern coincided with an influx of artists and actors to Edendale (commonly known as Echo Park and Silver Lake today) in the 1920s and 1930s where he lived on Westerly Terrace a few blocks from the Mack Sennett and Christie studios that were still located near there.³⁵ By 1940, he and his wife were living in a small 600 square foot backhouse at 624 N. Gramercy, possibly in an attempt to save money. Their place was near Melrose and Wilton and not far from Paramount Studio until making the final move to the northwest rural fringe of the city—the Valley—to be nearer to the studios during the war.³⁶

Driving restrictions were imposed upon all citizens for the war effort in keeping all motoring under 35 miles per hour and under 5,000 miles driven per year due to

³⁴ Classified Ad, *Los Angeles Times* 4 April 1929, A13.

³⁵ Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 10.

³⁶ Dan Farquar interview in Paul Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered*, 158-159. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Corrado lived at 1175 Vermont Avenue in the Dryden Apartment House. In the 1937 Los Angeles Directory he lived at 1250 Westerly Terrace. In the 1940 Census he was domiciled at 626 N. Gramercy Place.

gasoline rationing. Corrado probably carpooled to work with other actors, as was the case during the war even for lead actors. Although streetcars on major Hollywood streets ran every two-and-a-half minutes, a day player was especially vulnerable to the transportation demands as Los Angeles was so sprawled out. Bus service or street cars to any area on the edge of the city was sorely inadequate (running between every 15 minutes and one hour for most lines) and bit-players and extras had to be at studios in different parts of town on different days. However, this carpooling is likely to have spawned conversations and formed solidarity for Corrado with other actors.³⁷ When carpooling to a studio in the Valley, the new housing developments were clearly visible, and some of those conversations were probably about the amazing growth of the area, the former-Hollywood studios located or soon moving there, and how they as actors should buy a house there for convenience and for investment purposes.

Corrado would have been sensitive to the distance of the studios. Most, but not all, of his work was on a sound stage at one of the big eight.³⁸ As union requirements stipulated that any travel beyond 35 miles from the studio required extra pay for motion picture workers, he rarely went out of town.³⁹ Corrado had no long-term contract at a studio and as a “freelancer” worked in different studios, sometimes on a daily basis, so

³⁷ Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered*, 271. See also “Hollywood and the War,” *Palestine Post*, 22 January 1943, 4. See also Mark S. Foster, *Nation on Wheels: The Automobile Culture in America Since 1945* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003), 33.

³⁸ United Artists did not have a permanent studio building like the other Big 8, but contracted or rented outside production houses. However, some filming was done at 1041 N. Formosa.

³⁹ Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley*, 98. Today the requirement is 30 miles.

getting to the studio or location set quickly in the morning was crucial to any actor. Some of the places he lived may have served as convenient headquarters during engagements at particular studios. In fact, so necessary was rest after a long day on set that by the early 1920s, before many actors preferred to live in the Valley, roadside lodging on the way out to location sets catered to movie workers; with one motel's business card on Ventura Boulevard that read on the reverse, "Studio People: when working late, or if you have an early call, come to our Hotel Cabins."⁴⁰ Thus Corrado was part of the large exodus of motion picture workers that followed the studios from Hollywood to the Valley that began in the thirties with the introduction of sound. In fact, his multiple moves within Los Angeles followed the trend of the movie industry.

Actors like Corrado, and particularly extras, would have lamented the travel between the studios. Before becoming a starlet under contract at MGM, for example, actress Jean Harlow bounced around different studios as an extra or bit player and cursed "the cruelest of all burdens" being that the studios were not in the heart of Hollywood "cuddled up in one handy group." Instead, sprawled out from MGM in Culver City to First National (Warner Brothers) in Burbank—only twelve miles apart yet a great distance when traversing through Los Angeles street traffic—were the major movie-producing factories.⁴¹ Corrado had a great vantage point to compare and talk with other

⁴⁰ Business card from PKB Auto Court, 11439 Ventura Blvd. Rates were \$1, \$2, and \$3. Circa 1926. In the author's possession.

⁴¹ Tichi Wilkerson and Marcia Borie, *The Hollywood Reporter: The Golden Years* (NY: Cowan-McCann, 1984), 62. Jean Harlow wrote this in 1935.

actors about the new studios, as well as recent housing developments—Studio City grew to 25,000 people by 1932, for instance. In 1940, a short multi-lane highway was completed, which basically obliterated much of the scenic hills along the two-lane Cahuenga Pass and connected Hollywood to the San Fernando Valley making commuting to studios in Hollywood doable for a Sherman Oaks resident.⁴²

One benefit that was likely shared among movie workers was the geographical orientation of the Valley if one had to commute to Hollywood. For instance, producer David Selznick recommended to Charles C. Pettijohn, when he was relocating from New York, that he choose the Valley (specifically Toluca Lake near Lakeside Golf Club), because unlike Beverly Hills where Selznick was living, the area was *north* of Hollywood which meant that he would not have to commute home with the bright afternoon sun in his eyes.⁴³

Corrado may have preferred Sherman Oaks for its recently developed traffic arteries that connected to Beverly Hills and for Laurel Canyon Boulevard that was a windy shortcut to Hollywood.⁴⁴ The area's recently developed roads included Beverly Glen and the more vital Sepulveda Boulevard—the completion of the latter's paving was celebrated with a gigantic public fiesta that included a speech by the state's governor and

⁴² “New Traffic Link Cuts Across Scenic Cahuenga Pass,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 April 1940, H2.

⁴³ Pettijohn, Jr., *Diary of a Rich Man's Kid*, 79.

⁴⁴ “Community Development: Field Becomes Home Setting,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 November 1928, E4. See also “Sepulveda Link Being Built: Boulevard's Bridge Joins Main Artery,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 April 1922, E2.

with master of ceremonies by actor Leo Carrillo, a friend of Corrado and his brother Luis, who both could have been among the thousands in attendance.⁴⁵

Sherman Oaks was in Los Angeles city limits but resembled a suburb and would have been considered a step up from Corrado's and Zella's previous abode. Corrado had been married for almost ten years to Zella and despite their ages, they may have planned on having a child. Corrado may have appreciated the larger yard for childrearing and for gardening. Unlike Corrado's transient working-class neighborhood in Hollywood, the residents on his block of Dixie Canyon (twenty houses) were mostly successful entertainment workers, as well as an aircraft industry supervisor, bank manager, physician, and an attorney. Of the entertainment workers, they included an assistant director at MGM, a motion picture costumer, an interior decorator, a radio announcer, and several musicians and actors. Ub Iwerks who lived a few houses down the street was the animator who created Mickey Mouse at Disney and left the studio to start his own animation company that eventually failed; he did contract work at other studios, and returned in to Disney in 1940 as a supervisor and development engineer.⁴⁶

In the largest house on Dixie Canyon lived Joe Egli, a German-American, who was a casting director at Fox Studios (later Paramount) and married to an actress. His

⁴⁵ Valley Retrospective: The 1930s," www.Dailynews.com . The Fiesta took place October 20, 1935. See also "Many Southland Communities Join in Sepulveda Celebration," *Van Nuys News*, 17 October 1935, 1 and "Thousands Help Dedicate Important Link in Major Highway," *Van Nuys News*, 21 October 1935, 1.

⁴⁶ Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 56. See also John Kentworthy, *The Hand Behind the Mouse: An Intimate Biography of the Man Walt Disney Called the Greatest Animator in the World* (New York: Disney Editions, 2001), 181.

towering two-story Spanish-style abode on a double lot contained two elderly black servants in his household, one of which was both his gardener and driver.⁴⁷ Perhaps it was Egli who helped Corrado get a bit part playing an Italian ambassador in Paramount's *Casanova's Big Night* (1954) starring Bob Hope.

Corrado may have chosen Sherman Oaks also because by the late 1930s the community celebrated the notoriety as the home of many actors and entertainers. This strategy of civic engagement with celebrities was likely advised by Harry Culver, who made presentations to local Valley developers and civic leaders a decade earlier. Culver gave honorary constable badges to movie actors to promote his Culver City development and entice studios to locate there. The Valley may have gone one further, when several actors, directors, and producers, were invited by local chambers of commerce to promote the Valley's neighborhoods as honorary mayors, such as the first, Al Jolson in Encino. In 1939, actor Richard Arlen was the honorary mayor of Sunland and character actor Andy Devine held the post in Van Nuys. Sherman Oaks's Honorary Mayor in 1939 was Tom Keene, western film star who, though not the first Valley mayor, claimed he held the distinction of riding a horse to work, and as part of his inauguration had a rodeo fiesta that featured well-known personalities from the screen.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ This was culled from the 1939-1940 San Fernando Valley Directory, 167, and the 1940 U.S. Census. See also "Show Time," *Miami Daily News*, 21 March 1948, 2-B.

⁴⁸ Starr, *Material Dreams*, 73. "Cinema Star is Now Mayor of Sherman Oaks," *Van Nuys News*, 9 March 1939, 4. See also "Film Star will be Guest Monday at Little Theater," *Van Nuys News*, 16 November 1939, Section 2, 2. See also Ethel M. Taylor, "Spice of Life," *Van Nuys News*, 17 August 1939, 2.

Among the home seekers to the Valley were several movie workers that Corrado would have known from the studios. Alphonse Martell may very well have told Corrado about the area in detail. Martell was a French actor that was typecast as a waiter and occasionally worked alongside Corrado in restaurant scenes. Though living in Sherman Oaks for a few years, Martell moved to West Hollywood, possibly to be near MGM and Twentieth-Century. Lloyd Bacon, who knew Corrado from the silent days when they were both bit players, became a leading director and regularly offered Corrado a bit part in all of his productions. Bacon lived in Sherman Oaks and his farm included a family fruit orchard, gardens, and a swimming pool.⁴⁹

No one escaped San Fernando Valley boosting. Valley real estate was advertised on radio shows, billboards, and in magazines. Perhaps a more poignant example of the saturation was that around the time of his move there was a song, “San Fernando Valley,” sung by Roy Rogers for a Republic picture of the same name. A throwaway tune by Sherman Oaks resident Gordon Jenkins, the songwriter was surprised when it became a monster hit for Bing Crosby. The catchy novelty song (one line is “I’m gonna settle down and never more roam/ and make the San Fernando Valley my home”) could not have been ignored given Corrado’s work with Crosby in several films and his

⁴⁹ Jackson Mayers, *The San Fernando Valley* (Walnut, CA: John D. McIntyre, 1976), 302. Bacon lived at 14854 Burbank Boulevard.

appearance in a Roy Rogers film (*The Cowboy and the Senorita*) just as the tune climbed the *Billboard* charts in late April of 1944 to stay at number one for five weeks.⁵⁰

Industry magazines often advertised real estate to its movie worker readers. For instance, *The Hollywood Reporter*, a film industry magazine whose advertisements were usually film-related and whose editor was a real estate speculator and restaurateur, actually ran a full-page real estate advertisement on its reverse cover promoting the West Valley area of Northridge (formerly named North Los Angeles) that was ten miles further out from Hollywood than was Sherman Oaks. The magazine's advertisement promoted 10,000 undeveloped acres in Northridge solely based on the area's "close proximity to Hollywood and Beverly Hills," and listed the current stars, producers, and directors that already had ranches there and the pedigreed polo fields, bridle paths, and hunting grounds that would "satisfy the most the most exacting demands" of the newly rich.⁵¹

Realtors, advertisers, and newspaper editors welcomed the film industry and its workers, along with the area's other big industry—aircraft—to the modest small farms in the area. One local paper's editorial claimed "Many men working in motion picture studios, stores, and factories live on these small farms where they and their families have elbow room to keep domestic livestock and pets." Corrado's neighborhood had

⁵⁰ Bruce Jenkins, *Goodbye: In Search of Gordon Jenkins* (Berkeley, CA: Frog, Limited, 2005), 274-277. The AFI Catalog shows *San Fernando Valley* was produced 22 May through late June 1944, and was released 15 September 1944.

⁵¹ Northridge in San Fernando Valley 10,000 Acres," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2 November 1937, reverse cover.

restrictions against “agricultural enterprises” but s likely he wanted room to garden on an 8,825 foot lot, or about a fifth of an acre.⁵²

Certainly a major factor in Corrado’s purchase of a house was changes in the government’s lending policy under President Roosevelt’s New Deal legislation. As part of the recovery act of the early 1930s following a housing market doflinkflinkwnturn, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) adopted a ten percent down payment or less for a mortgage loan. However, the FHA had an anti-urban bias which classified areas such as Hollywood as crowded and undesirable because “older properties tend to accelerate the transition to lower class occupancy,” according to one report. This was another factor that encouraged many actors to leave the congestion and small lots of Hollywood for the periphery of the Valley.⁵³

As for Italians in the area, there were few. It is unknown if finding an Italian community was a major consideration for Corrado. If nothing else, Italian farmers were not totally unfamiliar to the almost homogenous local Anglo population. At least a scattering of Italians had lived in the Valley since the “pioneer” times, such as the cowboy ranching Ghiglia family in Van Nuys who started off growing grapes and during the First World War were one of southern California’s biggest lima bean producers.⁵⁴ A

⁵² “Editorial,” *Van Nuys News*, 20 July 1936, 2. *Van Nuys News*, Advertisement for Caighurst, 13 August 1926, 9. The lot size is from MLS appraisal sites that track past property sales.

⁵³ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: University of Oxford Press, 1985), 187, 199-208.

⁵⁴ Catherine Mulholland, *Owensmouth Baby: The Making of a San Fernando Valley Town* (Northridge, CA: Santa Susana Press, 1987). During the 1917-18 growing season, Valley farmers produced over 5 percent of California’s bean crop. See page 109. The town outside of Santa Barbara of Ghiglia is named for

mile from Corrado's home was the largest independent dairy operator in the Valley run by the Del Fante family.⁵⁵ Across the 12-mile width of the Valley at Sylmar were the Mudugno and Fusano families who both came to the area in 1906 from Bari—Corrado's mother's Italian birthplace and an area known for its olive oil production—and started an olive oil processing plant and cannery whose advertisements claimed their company owned the world's largest contiguous olive grove.⁵⁶

More recent Italian arrivals included Chef Joseph Milani (North Hollywood), and a half-Italian part of the comedic pair Abbot and Costello: Lou Costello (Sherman Oaks). Most of the Italian-American movie worker residential patterns in the Valley were similar to Corrado's, with a few variations such as Dario Farfalla, who, having been born in Rome, and instead of beginning in San Deigo such as Corrado, started on the East Coast as an accountant with Selznick studio at Fort Lee, New Jersey—presumably until the studio burned down in 1923—before he came to Burbank as a controller at First

his family. In 1900 the Ghiglia family moved to Burbank and shortly after, son Frank Ghiglia moved to Van Nuys and started a ranch near Oxnard and Ventura Boulevard. In the late 1920s, Frank moved to another farm on Victory and Hayvenhurst. See "Frank Ghiglia," *Van Nuys News*, 10 May 1929, 1. See also 1920 Federal Census for George Ghiglia and 1920 and 1930 Federal Census reports for Frank Ghiglia. See also 1924 San Fernando Valley City Directory.

⁵⁵ *Southwest Contractor*, 5 February 1915, 33. Del Fante owned a 57-acre dairy farm.

⁵⁶ "Mudugno and Fusano olive growers, circa 1918. San Fernando Valley History Digital Library (www.digital-library.csun.edu.) The image is from the private collection of Jean Darter. For information on Terra di Barri and olive oil cultivation, see Enrico Dal Lago, *Agrarian Elites: American Slaveholders and Southern Italian Landowners, 1815-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 33.

National. Later Farfalla moved deeper into the Valley with his wife to Van Nuys in 1939 and a few years later, still in the Valley, to North Hollywood.⁵⁷

George Humbert was another Italian actor that like Corrado often played a waiter, but stayed in Hollywood. Humbert appeared in dozens of films alongside Corrado sometimes as the chef. Born in Pisa and raised in Florence, until he was twenty-seven, he had a similar story as Corrado. Humbert—whose real name was Umberto Gianni—was thirteen years older than Corrado and became typecast as a waiter by the mid-1930s, a few years before him.⁵⁸ The two actors were in the same casting category and competitors for similar roles, but were likely to have been friends and perhaps occasionally carpooled together as they both lived close by in Hollywood. In the late 1940s, Humbert focused on television, leaving waiter roles to younger actors.

⁵⁷ See World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 for Daris [Dario] Lucien Farfallo. See also “Producer Secretly Weds Poet,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 August 1935, A2. Farfalla lived at 4117 Vantage in North Hollywood, according to his *Times* obituary of 3 June 1944. Burbank City Directory for 1928. Bernard Dick, *City of Dreams: The Making and Remaking of Universal Pictures* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 40-41.

⁵⁸ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; *Naturalization Records of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California, Central Division (Los Angeles), 1887-1940*; Microfilm Serial: M1524; Microfilm Roll: 174. See also 1919 San Francisco Directory.



Figure 10. Corrado (left), George Humbert (chef), and Alphonse Martell (waiter) in *Hired Wife* (1940).

Corrado could have noticed the imminent path of development and realized this made a perfect opportunity for an Italian with access to capital and expertise in restaurateuring. Corrado's brother Luigi, sometimes going by Luis, reported his income as a catering manager at Willard's in 1939 was \$2,400. He was either let go or quit in 1940 when Cecil B. DeMille bought the property on Hillhurst for another Derby restaurant. Luis continued working in food as a soda shop manager at Best Drug Store on Wilshire until finding the job at the Santa Anita Relocation Center commissary, later he became the manager of the large cafeteria at Los Angeles Post Office annex.

Corrado had actually made less money than his brother. In 1940, he reported that his income for 1939, the epic year when he had appeared in more films than ever

before, about 20 or so, was only \$800—a low income figure for the era.⁵⁹ Strangely, Corrado's other brother Lorenzo's (Lawrence's) income was estimated to have been \$1,400 for the 1939 year as an actor—probably all his roles as an extra—quite likely he also waited tables, possibly at Gordon's on Wilshire, a late-night Beverly Hills dinner spot with cocktails and dancing. Corrado must have struggled financially through the 1940s and considered a second job or other work altogether.⁶⁰ He had usually played waiter roles (though less so during the war) with little variation. Corrado's brother Luis, who had ample restaurant experience and was a leader in the caterer's union, likely encouraged him to start a restaurant, but it would have to wait on the backburner.

⁵⁹ These figures are from the 1940 United States Census Records.

⁶⁰ According to a matchbook cover, Gordon's was located on 9673 Wilshire Boulevard and was open until 3am.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN:

HUNGRY HOLLYWOOD:

ACTORS, CAFES, AND STRIKES IN THE 1940s

The social barometer is remarkably sensitive in Hollywood, and it is in evidence whenever the citizens of movieland gather. The major-domos of the restaurants and night clubs enforce the unwritten laws of social rating with a skill wondrous to behold.

Leo C. Rosten, *Hollywood: The Movie Colony*.¹

The main industry sustaining Hollywood's talent pool was food service and many of the area's restaurants were staffed with current or former actors. Hedda Hopper became a Hollywood gossip columnist, but she wrote as an insider after having spent several years as a struggling bit player: "[Y]ou've got to take your hats off to the girls with grit enough to do the jobs in cafes, shops, and kitchens, after they've been disillusioned in Hollywood and their promises not fulfilled." Hopper concluded, "But the prize for hardihood goes to those actors who have seen the years roll by without bringing them fame or fortune. Those are the ones who make up the background of our pictures, who sometimes do little more than stand and wait."²

At least one struggling young actress who had been "standing and waiting" for three years was highlighted in a documentary film. The buxom twenty-one year old

¹ Leo C. Rosten, *Hollywood: The Movie Colony* (New York: Hartcourt, Brace and Co. 1941), 171.

² Hedda Hopper, "Hollywood Career No Job for Weaklings," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 January 1939, C3. For Hopper's rise in the late '30s, see Samantha Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood: A Biography of Louella Parsons* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 210.

actress Jane Barnes who appeared with Corrado in a few films was tested and featured in an MGM documentary short about the life of an extra in a studio, called *The Hollywood Extra!*. The actress was highlighted in MGM publicity as the “Perfect Extra” and was offered a small speaking role in a film (playing an Italian character), her real big break never came and she would later continue in minor roles such as in *A Star is Born* where she played a waitress.³

Some aspiring actresses chose to work in restaurants that they knew were a mecca for producers and directors rather than try their luck at the studio gates or with Central Casting. Often these waitresses kept an 8x10 photograph and a calling card on hand. This paid off for at least one actress from Oklahoma City who was given a big break. The *Beverly Hills Citizen*, a local newspaper, considered it newsworthy that a brown-haired stately young woman working as a waitress at the Beverly Hills Brown Derby was offered a supporting role by a lunching producer. She quit waitressing and when she would eventually walk through the Derby’s doors again, she claimed, it would be as “a patron who holds a film contract.”⁴ Not all actors that received a contract immediately quit their day job, especially if they had previously experienced long gaps in employment or had been warned by other actors not to have delusions of grandeur. Some restaurants maintained flexible part-time hours and had managers experienced in dealing with

³ “Perfect Extra in Man of the People,” *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studio News*, 9 January 1937, 2.

⁴ “Derby Watress Wins Film Role and Leaves Job,” *Beverly Hills Citizen* 3 October 1937, 4. The waitress was Billie Martin. The producer was William Anthony McGuire who offered her a contract for the film *Rosalie* (1937).

aspiring actors. One such was Eaton's near Republic Studios in Studio City, where one actress, who despite changing her name for the screen and upon landing a small role for a picture at Republic, claimed that she would keep her hostessing job "just in case."⁵

For nearly all actors that had already hit the big leagues, waiting tables was like a baseball player being sent down to the minors. Once someone had achieved name recognition it could be damaging for one's reputation to serve a bunch of hungry bit players. When MGM boss Louis B. Mayer personally ordered a young Clark Gable to cease having an affair with alluring co-star Joan Crawford during the making of *Possessed* for fear of scandal, Gable complied, acknowledging the reality that "[Mayer] would have ended my career in fifteen minutes and I had no interest in becoming a waiter."⁶

⁵ Box 14, folder 6, "April 2, 1943." Jimmy Star Collection, Arizona State University. Jane Dillon (real name Pahnee Sylva) was the waitress at Eaton's who signed for *Little Sisters*.

⁶ Mark A. Veira, *Irving Thalberg: Boy Wonder to Producer Prince* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 157. It was during the filming of *Possessed*, where Gino Corrado plays a party-goer that the romantic affair occurred.



Figure 11. Corrado celebrating during the filming of *Sing While You Dance*.

Gino Corrado, now somewhat renowned, celebrated his 400th role as a waiter on the set of *Sing While You Dance*. The Columbia publicity department took the opportunity to capture the event for posterity by sending out a photographer to snap the film's beautiful female star, Ellen Drew, waiting on Corrado. The snipe on the reverse of the publicity photo claimed that the "classic-featured, wax mustached actor said he has averaged almost 28 waiter roles a year for the last 18 years."⁷ Corrado, like most actors, was quick to exaggerate for the sake of exposure. Even if Corrado's statistics are slightly embellished, he was still recognized as the most familiar waiter on the silver screen.

Gino Corrado's films demonstrated old world elegance and his workplace was usually where one could find the most ornate and opulent restaurant sets that a major studio's budget could afford. However, the conservation of materials, the recycling of sets, and renting instead of building new sets during the war began to change what films depicted. So he was directly affected by the disturbances caused when set decorators walked out of their studios on March 12, 1945 due to labor disputes. The continued labor troubles in Hollywood turned even uglier when studio police at Warner Brothers fought a battle with strikers that the press dubbed the "Battle of Burbank." The strikes ended but resumed several times throughout the late 1940s.⁸

This most serious unemployment problem since the 1930s hit Hollywood hard in 1945. Some union leaders claimed 25 to 35 percent of actors were out of work. MGM

⁷ Columbia Pictures promotional 8x10 photograph for *Sing While You Dance* (1946), titled "Star waits on veteran waiter." GCC

⁸ "Making Sets and Making Do," *Palestine Post*, 13 November 1932, 4.

was the most affected studio and laid off many of its longtime employees. Costumers were greatly affected. Veterans returning home from the war and looking for work in an industry that had profited from the war, found, as *Costumers' News* put it, “the true Hollywood... Too many employers honoring our veterans for a job well-done instead of with a job badly needed.”⁹

Though motion pictures were considered an essential industry, labor problems affected production during the war, if only slightly. As one office worker at Universal Studios wrote in a letter to his brother in the Army in March of 1945:

No doubt you've read about the recent strike—and even the office employers were affected. I still don't know what it's all about—have heard so many conflicting versions—but since our guild is part of the A.F.L. (one of the fighting unions), vote was taken not to cross the picket line, etc.—sort of a sympathy strike. So all told, we were out of work from last Tuesday through Saturday—and back to work this Monday. The vacation was swell—though we missed the money at the end of the week. Just when this strike will clear up, no one knows—but it is definitely between the two union heads—each jealous of the other's power—and so it goes—and as always—the little man is penalized. The studios are still able to operate with their limited help—but don't know how long—as set designers, painters, etc. are most essential.¹⁰

The catering industry had a symbiotic relationship with the movie industry and this extended to labor relations. In March, the studios were only at 80 percent of previous output. After several crafts returned to their job from a sympathy strike, the culinary worker unions, along with office workers, joined the movie workers, and increased the

⁹ “Mass Employment Hits Hollywood,” *Costumers News*, 7 February 1947, 4.

¹⁰ Letter dated 20 March 1945 from Jay (Jack?) Homowitz, on Universal Studios Company letterhead, to “Yank” Jack Homowitz. Letter was written on reverse and remailed to Private Ruth Homowitz (Women's Army Corps) at Craig Field, Alabama, postmarked 23 March 1945). In the author's possession.

combined total to 12,000 workers out on strike. Eating at the studio commissaries was no longer an option as virtually all commissaries were temporarily closed.¹¹ A separate city-wide culinary worker strike for higher wages began in September 1946 and affected 6,000 AFL culinary workers and bartenders at 84 restaurants and hotels. Hollywood's royalty were forced to make their own beds at several upscale hotels when chambermaids walked out, and many cancelled their plans when their favorite hot spots closed such as the Ambassador and all four Brown Derbys.¹²

The Screen Actors Guild (which represented Corrado) was officially neutral in terms of the Conference of Studio Unions locking out another union over a jurisdictional dispute. In December 1946, a policy review was called for by 350 Guild members. A grim reminder, their petition reported "Over 25 productions have been postponed or abandoned for the duration of this controversy; shooting and processing of color film has been discontinued ...and inexperienced workmanship retards current production to a snails [*sic*] pace. As a result more and more actors are unemployed every week."¹³ The screen actors voted to accept the wage increase that the studios offered. Day players would make \$55 instead of \$35 (\$115 to \$175 weekly), and now be compensated for time

¹¹ "Jurisdiction Over IBEW Work Asked by Local IA Local," *Hollywood Reporter*, 15 March 1945, 9.

¹² "Strike Hits Los Angeles Cafes, Bars," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 September 1946, 1. See also "Hollywood Stars Make Own Beds," 4 July 1946, 2.

¹³ "Actor Guild to Review Neutrality," *CSU News* 1 (December 14, 1946), 1.

spent in makeup and wardrobe.¹⁴ The cost of living increase in pay may not have sufficed for Corrado, who found himself hustling for roles that were becoming scarce.

Other contemporaries of Corrado's stature also found themselves in the same position. Actor Sig Arno had a somewhat successful career as a supporting actor in his native Germany. As a Jew, he decided to leave Germany in 1933, made one film in Portugal, and upon arriving in America was an assistant to Ernst Lubitsch. He later played small roles such as the tailor in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939). Arno had sometimes competed for similar parts with Corrado, though his characters were usually a little more off the wall such as a magician, a French official, or zany waiter. In fact, in the film *I Married an Angel* (1942), Arno played the role of the waiter, while Corrado played a hotel valet. In 1944 Arno was Count Peppi Le Loup in the operetta play *The Song of Norway*. While waiting to perform *The Song of Norway* at night, he studied painting during the day. Arno soon began painting the portraits of fellow actors, mostly in New York. By 1947, he found that his commissioned portrait paintings, as well as the ever-popular paintings of flowers, could support him better than acting. "They sell, and I like to eat," he said.¹⁵

One development that could have boosted Arno's movie career, as well as Corrado's, was a new magazine called *The Supporting Cast*. Premiering in 1948, this thirty-page mimeographed journal was less of a trade journal or union organ and more in

¹⁴ "SAG Votes on Wage Hike Offer of Studio," *Costumers' News*, 25 July 1947, 4.

¹⁵ "Colorful Art Exhibited by Comedian Sig Arno," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28 1947. Clipping from Margaret Herrick Motion Picture Library biographical files.

line with the best fan journals that were popular at the time. The magazine was published three times a year in southern California (by a movie buff that was a native of Illinois) and distributed to studio publicity departments, casting offices, columnists, and movie fans. Featuring biographies and vignettes of character actors, *The Supporting Cast* differed from *Screen Actor* in that it attempted to be the voice of the supporting stars and bit players—the backbone of the industry. Perhaps most importantly, the magazine created a forum where these players could gather support, give thanks, and air their complaints.

The Supporting Cast was released during the height of popularity of the Western genre and one issue featured a much-needed voice to a seasoned Native American actor named Rod Redwing who contributed a guest column. Besides reporting on his own work, Redwing's column highlighted his concerns about issues such as billing (or lack of) for the supporting cast, roles being cut out during editing, and casting offices not using real Indians in speaking parts. The latter is especially important considering Hollywood's most prominent and beloved Indian actor, Iron Eyes Cody, whom Redwing worked with and competed against for supporting roles, was actually born Espera de Corti in Louisiana to Sicilian parents. With opportunities lost despite the hundreds of Westerns shot on nearby lots, Redwing reasoned: "People should demand Indians in Indian parts. Indians and Chinese and Mexicans were very important in the early West. But you never see them in Western pictures."¹⁶ A large percentage of the actors featured

¹⁶ *The Supporting Cast*, Volume 2, No. 1:20. Another actor that played Indians who was likely Italian is Raven Grey Eagle who played mostly on western television shows beginning in 1952.

in the magazine were the older veterans most familiar to the readers, and more than a few had started during the silent era. Though inspiring, the magazine's debut was likely just too late to help Corrado.

Corrado married his second wife, Martha Hartford, in 1948. Little is known about her other than she was born and raised in Glendale. Considerably younger than Corrado, she was born in 1921 and was only 27 years old when she married him. Her father, who was actually younger than Corrado, worked in newspapers since graduating at USC and was an advertising manager at the *Los Angeles Times*.¹⁷ Martha lived in Studio City before she met Corrado and, considering where she chose her first residence away from her parents, may have worked in the local studios as an extra. However, by 1940, low employment levels in the motion picture industry contributed to many movie workers migrating to the aviation industry.¹⁸ During the war, women comprised most of the defense industry workforce in the area, so it is also plausible that young Martha Hartford, who moved near Lockheed-Vega during the later years of the war, was one of the riveters at the plant which would top 94,000 workers.¹⁹

¹⁷ Prior to marrying Corrado, Martha Hartford was living at 4524 Simpson Avenue in Studio City. It is also possible that she was a waitress when she met Corrado. See 1930 and 1940 U.S. Census and 1944 North Hollywood City Directory. In the 1946 North Hollywood and Studio City Directory she was listed as living with her mother, Winifred, at 6431 Denny Avenue. Emile Hartford, Martha's father was born in 1897 in Massachusetts, Corrado was born in 1893.

¹⁸ Mike Nielsen and Gene Mailes, *Hollywood's Other Blacklist: Union Struggles in the Studio System* (London, UK: British Film Institute, 1995), 65.

¹⁹ By mid-1943, 98,000 women were working in aircraft factories in Southern California. Most of them were single white females like Martha Hartford. See Laslett, *Sunshine was Never Enough*, 188-189.

What would attract a younger woman to Corrado? Besides being cultured in the arts, he was on the inside of the world's most glamorous industry. It may not have been impossible that the experienced Corrado charmed Martha and convinced her that he was a celebrity and still knew everyone in Hollywood. A more likely explanation for their marriage was that Martha was pregnant. The couple married on December 29, 1948 and Gina Mae Liserani was the couple's first and only child born April 6, 1949.²⁰

The birth of the dark-haired child must have been the actor's most momentous event, though she arrived at a tense moment late in his life. Corrado, 56 years-old and unemployed, now had a mortgage and new baby. He may have felt the pressure of aging as neither parenting nor hustling for acting gigs is a young man's game.

Corrado needed to supplement his career with another source of income. A look at Corrado's filmography for 1949 includes only four films: *Stratton Story* starring Gary Cooper, *The Fighting Kentuckian* starring John Wayne, *The Life of Riley* (adapted from the radio show and starring William Bendix) and director Vincente Minnelli's *Madame Bovary*. Attesting to the lack of large restaurant scenes, of the four films, Corrado played roles other than a waiter in the latter three: a French soldier, a candy store owner, and a village agricultural official. Never in Corrado's career had he appeared in such a small number of films for a whole year.

²⁰ In divorce records, there is no dispute of paternity from either party. Case No. D622607 and D661725), Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Archives and Records Center, Los Angeles, California.

On August 7, 1949, the *New York Times* carried a story regarding the effect of work stoppages in Hollywood on the career of one of Hollywood's working actors, Gino Corrado. In the story, Corrado revealed why he had accepted a position as the headwaiter for the Café Italia Restaurant in Beverly Hills:

...[T]hings are quiet around the studio now. I am not ashamed to be doing that kind of work. I took the job with the understanding that if anything came along in the way of a movie role, I'd have the privilege of taking it. They have stopped building big restaurant sets in pictures in order to economize. And if there are no restaurants and night clubs how can there be headwaiters?²¹

In the article, Corrado claimed his first waiter role was in *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum* in which he served Al Jolson. Either Corrado did not appear in the film, was not credited, or his scenes were cut out. In any case, Corrado's first confirmed role as a headwaiter was in the original talking Warner Brothers version of *Navy Blues*. Corrado believed he was typecast as a waiter when he began to play villains: "some people seem to consider headwaiters heavies. I played hundreds of headwaiters, waiters, maitre de's, more than anyone else in the movies."²²

Corrado became something of a luminary figure to real-life waiters in the 1940s and was often asked to sign autographs and even began receiving fanmail. Corrado was often offered other parts besides a waiter, but had to reject any that would require him to shave off his trademark mustache, as the studios had come to rely upon him for his

²¹ "From Reel Life to Real Life Headwaiter," *New York Times*, 7 August 1949, X-3.

²² Ibid. Corrado was listed as a supporting actor and a villain in the 1926 *Casting Directory*.

waiter roles. Corrado attributed his success in creating this niche to his sense of professionalism:

I played those roles to perfection. In the movies, you know, everything has to be just so for the value of the camera. I have observed the best maitre de's at work in Hollywood and elsewhere. I go to restaurants and talk to headwaiters and watch their mannerisms, how to bow, lead the table, seat a party and so on. I have studied up on the subject and know everything there is to know about it. I also learned recipes—I am an epicure—and I have my own herb data at home.²³

Corrado's opportunity to use some of his skills came when Joe Vallera (Corrado's friend and neighbor) opened Café Italia in March of 1949. Vallera, an Italian immigrant from the Abruzzo region, migrated to America in 1921 where he worked as a chef in several Hollywood restaurants. His new venture, Café Italia, billed itself as the "World's most outstanding Italian restaurant" where one could "dine among stars."²⁴ Perhaps what may have also made the position at the restaurant irresistible for Corrado was live opera shows on the patio. However, these open-air concerts were almost cancelled when during an operatic high note of Pagliacci, annoyed neighbors called the police because of the loud singing at late hours. When Vallera was told that any more complaints would result in an arrest and possible jail time, the restaurant owner asked for a jury trial that resulted in a citation and a mandate that all future shows end by 10 PM.²⁵

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, 15 March 1949. Advertisement, B3.

²⁵ "Noise or Sweet Music? Beverly Hills Jury Will Hear 'Pagliacci' Case." *Los Angeles Times*, 2 August, 1949, A1.

Joe Vallera sympathized with Corrado's situation caused by labor disputes in the film industry, as he himself was affected by disruptions caused by picketers. Only a few years earlier when the American Federation of Labor Culinary Workers became embroiled in a dispute over one of Vallera's employee's pay at Vallera's Rotisserie and Delicatessen (later renamed as Café Italia), stench bombs were thrown at the restaurant during the workers' Christmas Party, scattering those in attendance. Interestingly, one of the suspects later apprehended and charged with throwing the bomb was himself an out-of-work struggling actor, hired by the Union.²⁶

When Corrado was offered to do the job of real-life waiter, he was happy to do the work. For Café Italia, it must have been a boost to business. Patrons, some of whom were in the movie business, were amused to be waited on by Corrado. Easily recognized even by many outside of the film business, he signed autographs, sometimes 30 to 50 a day often inscribed on menus. Corrado claimed that waiting tables was not that different from acting. "It's all showmanship, down to the serving of the crepe suzettes."²⁷

Crepe suzettes were actor Don Ameche's favorite and was the dish that often characterized a successful restaurant. In a series of articles called "Café Man Lifts the Lid on Hollywood Nightlife" in the *Hollywood Studio Union News*, a recipe for the dish tells how easily a waiter could become a showman in the process of serving:

²⁶ "Stench Bombs Touched Off in Wilshire Café," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 December, 1947, A2. At the party were 60 loyal workers that belonged to the union but had refused to strike over the employee's pay issue.

²⁷ "From Reel Life to Real Life Headwaiter," *New York Times*, 7 August 1949, X-3.

First a suzette is only a milk-and-flour pancake, made light and thin. They are fried in the kitchen, but their fame and flavor stems from an operation performed at the patron's elbow in the dining room: making the sauce in a chafing dish. I won't try to give proportions for every restaurateur and good waiter has his own, but you start with butter. When this gets hot, the waiter splits an orange, grasps a half in a napkin and squeezes out the juice. He then stirs the two adding brandy, crème de cocoa and another liqueur or two. (Sometimes he throws in whatever is in reach). After the sauce is brought almost to a boil, the pancakes are placed in the chafing dish, and each is quickly rolled.²⁸ ` `

How much Corrado received in salary is hard to say. Since the early part of the century, tipping was initially opposed by the Hotel and Restaurant Union who demanded a higher minimum wage that would make waiters independent of subsisting on tips. Still controversial by 1946, one writer in the *Atlantic Monthly* claimed that to tip was akin to saying "I am a noble lord generously scattering largess to human serfs."²⁹ *The Los Angeles Times* applauded Vallera for instituting a "no tipping" policy at all his restaurants, one of which was the Rotisserie, or "Notipperie," the paper jested.³⁰ Whether the practice was continued when the Rotisserie became the Café Italia is unlikely, as the restaurant was created to target the Hollywood crowd where their legendary tipping was welcomed.

²⁸ "Café Lifts Lid on Hollywood Night Life," *Hollywood Studio Union News*, 6 July 1945, 2.

²⁹ Kerry Segrave *Tipping: An American Social History of Gratuities*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998), 78-79. See also Clyde Brion Davis, "Tips," *Atlantic Monthly* 178 (September 1946), 126-127. *Life* magazine also ran an editorial against tipping in its 15 July 1946 issue, and cited that at a nightclub in New York, waiters received between \$100 and \$200 per week in tips, while headwaiters made \$300 to \$600.

³⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, 1 April 1946, A5.

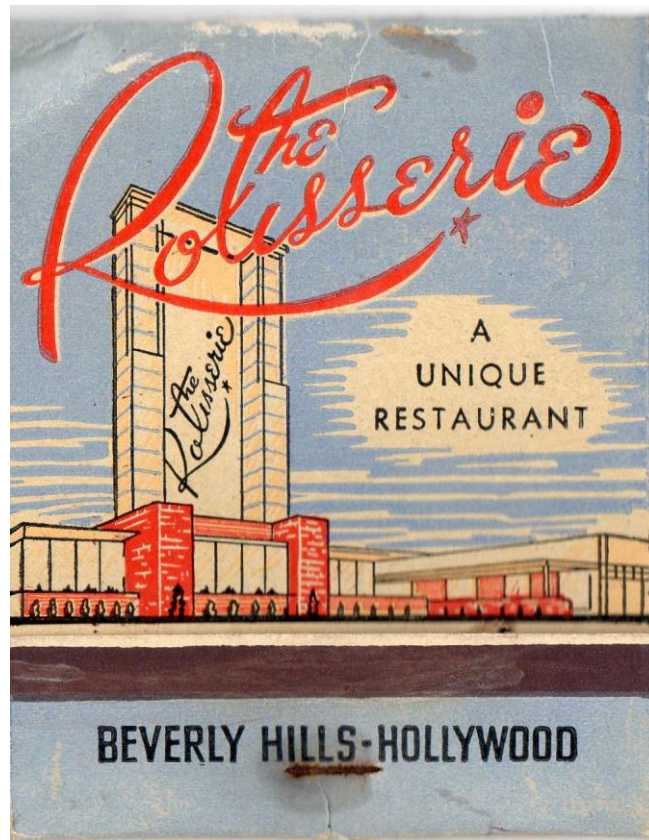


Figure 12. Matchbook cover showing the Rotisserie in Beverly Hills, circa 1947.

According to the *Studio Union News* article, a waiter at Chasen's (a favorite for actors and directors) claimed Orson Welles was a big tipper and if his meal came out to \$5, he often would give another \$5 to the waiter. The tips from Welles eventually became smaller and smaller, according to the waiter, because the restaurant owner probably said something to him, which was typical when the house was getting a disproportionate share of what the customer was spending. The waiter reminded the owner at Chasen's: "Don't forget, such personalities like to show off. The tipping is part of their act."³¹ Waiters also

³¹ *Studio Union News*, Ibid.

had a role to play. One waiter who had worked in New York's finest restaurants claimed there were two schools of extracting tips: the dominating and the ingratiating. The first strategy was considered the best, as most people tipped from a sense of inferiority, not goodwill. Establishing moral dominance and acting bored, according to the theory, could translate into the patron giving a good tip in order to win back the respect of the waiter. The latter method involved social deference and alertness to garner a good tip, but was often not as effective.³²

If Corrado wanted to know who was who in Hollywood, waiting tables was the best place to watch actors when they were out on the town away from the studios. Waiting tables was a profession where one could hone his or her skills at reading people. As the waiter in the article claimed, that was precisely the business of a good headwaiter. "He'll come close to guessing in an instant, your business, how much you'll spend, what you'll order and how much you tip."³³

The most successful headwaiter in Hollywood in terms of tips was Bill Chalias, who worked at the Brown Derby Restaurant in Hollywood from 1929 to 1955. The Hollywood elite displayed their status to their peers by getting the best tables in the restaurant, so knowing Chalias became essential. A testament to this fact was that Chalias's Christmas yearly tips were \$10,000 at the height of the Depression. An institution known for veteran waiters who earned big tips was the restaurant Musso and

³² Segrave. *Tipping*, 73. Taken from Dwight McDonald, "Your waiter looks at you," in *Harper's Magazine* 182 (April 1941), 14. The waiter was Jimmy Nearos.

³³ *Los Angeles Times*, 18 July 1945, 7.

Frank Grill on Hollywood Boulevard, an elegant French restaurant favored by the Hollywood elite for its mahogany private booths and strong drinks. Musso and Frank had originally been started in 1919 to cater specifically to nouveau-riche film stars. One observer described waiting tables at the restaurant as “a coveted diploma in the restaurant fraternity” where busboys worked for almost nothing—just for the chance of one day becoming a waiter themselves.³⁴

The most well-known Italian waiter in Hollywood was likely Giuseppe “Joe” Malatesta. Described by his co-workers as looking like an Italian version of suave French actor Charles Boyer, he had worked as the maitre d’ at Romanoffs in Beverly Hills from the 1930s through the 1950s, serving Hollywood’s biggest stars, such as Humphrey Bogart and Charlie Chaplin, who were also investors in the restaurant. In 1935, Malatesta, who also occasionally scored extra roles in films, possibly alongside Corrado, wrote a whimsical book titled *Incognito in Hollywood: In Four Languages*. As the title indicated, the 96-page book contained the same story in four different romance languages, including Italian, probably for tourists. The short story was written through the eyes of a reporter for a New York newspaper who followed a movie extra who was (unknowingly to the reporter) a lead actor during the silent era. Speaking through the reporter character in a first person voice, Malatesta alluded to the power that incognito waiters had in

³⁴ Frederica Sangor Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A Writer in Early Hollywood* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), 118. According to LAtimemachines.com, Frank and Musso Grill was started by Joseph Musso (an Italian) and Frank Toulet, and in 1926 was sold to Joseph Carissimi and John Mosso (not to be confused with Musso).

Hollywood by selling stories (“special dishes”) to newspaper reporters for those readers “who love to devour the entrée that Hollywood frequently supplies.”³⁵

Though Malatesta served Hollywood’s elite, the Italian waiter to have most inspired Corrado was probably the waiter-turned-restauranteur Alexander Perino. Working for years waiting tables at the Biltmore Hotel in downtown, Perino eventually became headwaiter at the French fine-dining café Victor Hugo, considered Los Angeles’s fanciest restaurant and where studio executives sometimes held their galas. After a few stints at other restaurants including the short-lived Embassy club that was attached to the Montmontre and at the Town House whose opening night garnered only one person in the dining room, Perino borrowed money and opened his own restaurant, Perino’s, on Wilshire Boulevard in 1932. The place became the pinnacle of fine dining in Los Angeles and attracted wealthy and elite patrons including visiting presidents. Perino’s enforced a strict dress code and demanded the finest and most authentic ingredients. Although Perino never exclusively served the movie crowd—there were not even corner tables—a steady flow of movie people frequented the café.³⁶ As both Corrado’s brothers were in the catering business, and Corrado claims to have carefully studied the techniques of real waiters for his acting roles, he likely knew Perino. The restaurant owner was well-known

³⁵ Joe Malatesta, *Incognito in Hollywood: In Four Languages* (Los Angeles: Wetzel Publishing 1935), 12.

³⁶ Betty Goodwin, *Hollywood du Jour: Lost Recipes of Legendary Hollywood Haunts* (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 1993), 35-36. Kurt Niklas and Larry Hamm, *The Corner Table: From Cabbages to Caviar, Sixty Years in the Celebrity Restaurant Trade* (Los Angeles: Tuxedo Press, 2000), 41.

for chatting with stars and patrons about recipes, and for Corrado there was probably no better restaurateur to learn from.

Corrado would have noticed that Perino demanded meticulous service from his wait staff. Having been a waiter himself, Perino believed that waiters should anticipate what diners wanted before they asked, but never inquire if cocktails were wanted and never hover for a tip. In general, waiters should be invisible.³⁷ Perino's French-Italian restaurant set the standard for the rules of fine dining in Los Angeles and was likely a model that Corrado tried to emulate.

The fact is that Corrado, a person so identified with the service of food in popular culture, wanted to open his own eatery. For reasons unknown, his employer Café Italia went out of business in April 1950.³⁸ Though the location at 8670 Wilshire was sold, a few years earlier Joe Vallera had leased another property at Sunset and Vine—there were two Rotisserie restaurant locations at one time—and it may have been upon his recommendation that Corrado should open a new restaurant near where that one had been.

Vallera was possibly an initial partner or an investor in Corrado's new venture. He was at least a consultant, and would have emphasized as key to success: regional cuisine, entertainment, and location. He may have told Corrado to locate on Sunset

³⁷ Lois Dwan, "The Man Who Set the Standards," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 January 1982, L83.

³⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, 30 April, 1950, B17. Apparently this \$500,000 Beverly Hills 10,000 square foot property containing five separate parcels (8670 to 8684 Wilshire) was to be auctioned off on May 3, 1950. It included \$100,000 in modern equipment and a liquor license was to be sold with the business.

Boulevard, not too far from the studios, and that he should not simply serve “Italian food,” but specialize in a regional cuisine like that of Vallera’s region of Abruzzo to create an exotic ethnic experience for patrons. The other piece of advice may have been to make sure Corrado’s eatery was as glamorous as possible, secure a liquor license, and construct an interesting bar with ample seating—both Café Italia and the two earlier Rotisserie restaurants had cocktail lounges—the Sunset location had a 70 stool bar.³⁹ Attention to all these details would bring in celebrities, at least one hoped, so patrons could “dine among stars” as Vallera advertised.

³⁹ An oversized Feature matchbook, circa late 1940s, for the Rotisserie shows the restaurant having two locations, Beverly Hills and Hollywood. Both locations had bars and entertainment. An illustration of the sprawling restaurant building shows it dwarfed by a very large sign, perhaps thirty feet tall.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
CATERING TO THE STUDIOS:
RESTAURANTS AND THE BUSINESS OF FEEDING THE
MOVIE INDUSTRY

Restaurants, an important component of the Hollywood glamour life, had their predecessors in New York, where many European immigrants played a significant role in bringing elegant European civility to those who could afford it. Two brothers from the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland started the restaurant Delmonico's in the 1830s. It quickly rose to dominate the socializing center of the urban elite.¹ By the 1890s, the Waldorf-Astoria, a more public establishment, was another spot where many actors celebrated theatrical success on 42nd and Broadway, near Times Square. From these famous restaurants on Broadway playwright David Belasco and theater actors who were the part of the early star system began promoting conspicuous consumption to America.²

Several restaurants and nightclubs in Los Angeles were inspired by New York clubs. For instance, the Cocoanut Grove in New York's Century Theater opened in 1917, and was followed by a Los Angeles club of the same name in the Ambassador Hotel. The

¹ The two brothers that started Delmonico's, Giovanni and Pietro, were from Marengo, Switzerland, near the Italian border.

² Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1981), 10-13

famous Stork Club had a similarly-named contemporary on Western and Florence. A brash, prosperous, cabaret on Broadway and 50th, the Montmartre opened in 1916, named after a Parisian nightlife area, also had a later west coast namesake.³

The father of Hollywood nightlife was Eddie Brandstetter, who, helped by Hollywood real estate magnate Charles Edward Toberman, opened the famous Montmartre on Hollywood Boulevard after World War I. Previously, Hollywood was thought to be out in the sticks, so showbiz people dined in downtown Los Angeles. As the city expanded, the Montmartre became a favorite of the Hollywood elite by the 1920s and it is likely Corrado would have frequented it during the height of his career.⁴

Rivalling Brandstetter in ambition was another filmdom restaurateur personality, Harry M. Sugarman, an English-born Jew who begun his career by working in the motion picture industry.⁵ A natural promoter, Sugarman (nicknamed “Sugie”), arrived in Hollywood in 1902 and became the manager and operator of many West Coast theatres, including the famous Egyptian Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard. His restaurant, Sugie’s Tropics, which was located on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills carried in its menus the motto “the informal dining room and cocktail lounge of the motion picture industry,” and featured drinks named after stars, such as Sonja Henie’s (a Norwegian Olympic

³ Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out*, 120-121. See also Stanley Walker, *The Night Club Era* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1999 edition), 78.

⁴ Café Lifts Lid on Hollywood Night Life,” *Hollywood Studio Union News*, 6 July 1945, 7.

⁵ Menu from Sugie’s Tropics, Beverly Hills, circa 1944. Sheet music for the song “Sugie Boogie Woogie” (written by Eddie Cherkose and Ben Rubinyi) has the line “Mingle with the movie people every night/ The food is strictly super and the price is right.”

skater turned actress) Thin Ice Celestial Delight, which stated that “if your girl friend was frigid, one of these will break the ice,” or actress Bette Davis’s Samoa of Samoa, which claimed to be “liquid lightening.” Strong alcohol was in demand by the Hollywood jet set, and Sugarman warned customers (in the drink menu), humorously, to “leave your name and address before ordering the third of any of these drinks.”⁶

A huge industry had developed, fueled by the big salaries and the routine time to kill between shoots that characterized the lifestyle of many film workers. With restaurants catering to film people, Corrado may have wondered, as an authentic Italian, if he should have gone into the catering business, himself. Corrado’s brother, Louis, who had left the film industry for the catering industry, became head of the Motion Picture Caterers Union, and realized some success with a stable career, and was respected by many movie stars such as friends Leo Carrillo and Hopalong Cassidy. It is likely that Louis Liserani would have told Corrado about tipping and salaries, as well as the favorite dishes of individual actors in Hollywood.

Hollywood’s eateries also performed a pragmatic function for the film industry. As the “backroom” of the motion picture industry, restaurants encouraged the “manufacturing” side of the business by facilitating a meeting space between those with studio passes (directors, writers, and actors) and those without (independent producers,

⁶ Ibid. These potent drinks mentioned are not those named for actors, but rather the house specialties, such as Sugie’s Head-Hunter.

the press, and especially agents).⁷ Rather than just a place to be seen by the public or to celebrate the end of a shoot, some dining establishments near the studios functioned as an auxiliary intimate studio space to do business and cement relationships.

The Brown Derby pioneered many of the services for the industry. Actors, agents, writers, and reporters frequented the “Derby” where it can be argued that all four of the Derby restaurants served this function especially the Vine location where, for example, in a typical work day an agent from William Morris might “do lunch” with a client visiting a studio from New York and talk business.⁸ The Derby was the first restaurant to introduce telephone lines and intercom systems at individual tables in order to facilitate business transactions between the studio executives. Some other services included, at least at the Vine location: actors receiving telephone messages or even mail addressed to them care of the Derby. The Derby also boasted of several dishes that were purportedly created and thus named after stars—such as Michael Curtiz’s paprika veal. The Hollywood Derby’s Vine flagship was owned by Cecil B. DeMille with a seating capacity of 300, open until 3am, and staffed with top-notch waiters. And if an agent were to somehow forget an actor’s face, there were over 1,000 actor caricatures adorning the

⁷ This is still true today exemplified by the New York accented “Let’s do lunch, hun.” common of an agent in Hollywood. See “The Back Room,” *Los Angeles Magazine*, February 2002, 86.

⁸ Frank Rose, *The Agency: William Morris and Hidden Hand of Show Business* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1995), 71.

walls—a tangible casting directory—all making the restaurant so integral for the business of motion pictures that it arguably surpassed any studio’s commissaries or offices.⁹

There were other restaurants used for business meeting purposes in the industry. Ciro’s, another favorite, was generally quiet until the musical entertainment got on stage in the later hours, an agent could meet his client after getting him a test for a part and have him scan the screenplay and other material just prior to his reading at a studio.¹⁰ Sometimes smaller unassuming places had importance too, particularly those restaurants in a short walking distance of a studio, where careers were made or unmade more than at any studio commissary.¹¹

Many actors who saw the importance of the restaurant in the film industry had opened their own restaurants or clubs. Clara Bow and Rex Bell—who together opened the “It” Café—actress Thelma Todd, and Fatty Arbuckle tried their luck as restaurateurs. Restaurants that attracted movie people always made the gossip columns and Hollywood’s restaurants could usually get a guaranteed clientele, but this in itself was not without caution, as actors often lived a “feast or famine” lifestyle and may have frequented restaurants, particularly when they were operated by friends. One gossip column announced that the Seven Seas Café on Hollywood Boulevard had been taken

⁹ *The Brown Derby Cookbook* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1949), 4-7.

¹⁰ This was the case with George Sanders who met his agent Bill Shiffrin at Ciro’s to scan material about *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), a part that he was successful in getting. See Bill Shiffrin and Mort Green, *In the Naval of a Flea: The Confessions of a Hollywood Agent* (1980, Unpublished). Margaret Herrick Motion Picture Library.

¹¹ Colman Andrews, *My Usual Table: A Life in Restaurants* (New York: Ecco, 2014), 6.

over by a B-movie silent film actor— now an actor-turned-restaurateur—who developed a fruit flavored alcoholic drink made from gin that was shaken into a snowy consistency, named “Gincicle.” However, the columnist reported that after the “usual group of freeloaders,” the expensive drink was abandoned from the menu.¹²

Another actor, essentially a bit player who specialized in playing soldiers and tough guys, opened his own restaurant. When dropped from a contract option with Warner Brothers, the thirty-year-old actor, Harry Lewis, decided to open a place he could work at between acting gigs, a casual place where directors, writers, and actors could all hang out. In 1950, he and his new girlfriend opened Hamburger Hamlet (named after his and every other actor’s goal of playing the role of Hamlet) on the Sunset Strip. With a \$3,500 investment and \$250 dollars a month rent, the small eatery of about 30 seats, with its décor of knotty pine, maple trim, redwood tables, and a copper-hooded fireplace, became a popular stop for film workers. One newspaper columnist often wrote his column from the restaurant and alerted the public of its stargazing possibilities. The one-time cook (before the restaurant expanded) and co-owner, Marilyn Lewis, wrote about their niche that contrasted many of Hollywood’s fine Italian cafés and led to their success: “When people are all suited up in black tie, I found that most of them actually prefer eating comfort foods, instead of the usual ‘things under glass’ or bland veal chops.”¹³

¹² Starr Collection, Box 14; Folder 4 (Persons to/ or by Jimmy Starr, 1937-139). The Seven Seas owner was former actor Ray Hallor.

¹³ Marilyn Lewis and Brigit Legere Binns, *"Marilyn, Are You Sure You Can Cook?" He Asked: A Memoir* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2000), 28-29; 34-35; 47, and 79.

Corrado likely knew the Hamburger Hamlet owners as his wife Martha would later work there as a manager and head cashier.

Corrado was someone in the business of both food and acting. Akin to his study of waiters for his acting roles, he likely consulted with several knowledgeable parties including his family who were experienced in restaurateuring. Corrado claimed to have saved the impressive sum of \$100,000 dollars at some time in his career. Although the exact era of when he was able to do this is unknown, and despite the fact that he was at his apex at the end of the silent film era, it is plausible that he accumulated this amount in the 1950s through his high number of appearances in films throughout the decades.

As Corrado loved antiquities, it is also possible that he also occasionally supplemented his income from selling antiques to his actor friends.¹⁴ In a letter to his uncle who owned three antique stores in Florence, London and Chicago, Corrado reported that his hobby was collecting unusual cups and saucers. He also inquired about how to sell a “Florentine throne” (perhaps he actually meant a bishop’s chair) that he had acquired, which his uncle assured him he would dispose of at a handsome profit. Possibly the antique throne was used in a film. For example, in *The Iron Mask*, Douglas Fairbanks gave many of the set pieces to his workers, such as the large restaurant tables. Corrado was given Fairbanks’ sword, along with his own.¹⁵ As a familiar face at many studios,

¹⁴ “Gino Corrado Cooks his Favorite Dish,” *Republic City News* [Republic, Kansas], 13 December 1928, 1.

¹⁵ In Bill Cappello’s interview, Corrado claimed to have been given two swords from Fairbanks, as the original was stolen from the set. A table from *The Iron Mask* appeared for sale on Craigslist (Ventura, CA) recently and was a gift to an employee. Douglas Fairbanks presented the large table to Jimmie Archibald with a small affixed metal plaque that said, “To Jimmie Archibald from Douglas Fairbanks: Built in a

Corrado may have somehow purchased or simply “taken” unwanted pieces from movie sets to sell as relics to collectors or fans. Another possibility is that Corrado, with a lot of free time, acquired antiques at auction or at estate sales to resell. Throughout the 1940s, Corrado’s father was an interior decorator, and may have encouraged an appreciation of Old World antiques.¹⁶

Corrado’s strongest link to the old country arguably derived from ethnic cuisine and family recipes. In Florence, Corrado’s family surely owned the cookbook *La scienza in cucina e l’arte di mangiar bene* translated as *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well* where many of their (or their servants’) traditional recipes probably first originated. The book was published in 1891 in Florence where the author had lived most of his life. Rejected by publishers and ultimately self-published, *La scienza in cucina e l’arte di mangiar bene* was, and still is, Italy’s classic cookbook, and sold 52,000 copies by 1910. The recipes were written as charming meandering stories that linked the history and gastronomy of Italy (in one story, the author digressed as to not actually give the recipe) in an attempt to codify Italy’s far-flung regional dishes. More importantly, the cookbook blended peasant fare with bourgeois French-influenced dishes that helped create a national cuisine culture that was palatable to the urban upper middle class and

studio shop for and used by me in *The Iron Mask* 1928.” Charles Higham also reported that much of the set “antiques” went out the backdoor at MGM and into an antique firm on Santa Monica Boulevard set up by Louis B. Mayer and another partner. See Higham, *Merchant of Dreams*, 158. For the gigantic silver throne seen in *The Iron Mask*, see Tibbitts and Welsh, *Douglas Fairbanks and the American Century*, 390.

¹⁶ Letter, dated 2 October 1937, on Italian Antique Galleries letterhead, from Corrado Trevisani (Gino Corrado’s uncle) addressed to Gino Corrado Liserani. GCC.

prompted the cookbook's author to state "Italian cuisine rivals French, and in some points betters it."¹⁷

Italian restaurants had been a phenomenon in America. As early as the mid-1880s, Italian, along with French and German, were the staple foreign cuisines until the end of the century. While French food was tainted as being upper-class and elitist, Italian food appealed to the American middle class as affordable, and by the turn of the 20th century Italian restaurants abounded in New York City, with most of the customers being American. Eventually these middle-class patrons transformed the restaurants that they patronized and Italian cooks hybridized their Italian dishes.¹⁸

Italian restaurants played an integral part in New York's vibrant nightlife of the 1920s. In bohemian, non-conformist Greenwich Village, Italian restaurants proliferated on every block, serving around-the-clock waves of local residents, bar-hoppers, and the uptown preppies who went slumming. At the end of the 1920s, many of New York's Italian restaurants were remodeled in a standard style that denoted Italian upscale atmosphere. The restaurants introduced a common musicality, and featured a standard menu that was a concoction of regional dishes often indistinguishable from other nearby

¹⁷ John Dickie, *Delizia!: The Epic History of the Italians and their Food* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2007), 211-212; 222. Carol Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil: Politics and Food in Italy* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 28.

¹⁸ Andrew P. Haley, *Turning the Tables: Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 100-107.

Italian restaurant menus—usually with dependence on the red sauce, garlic, and melted cheese of Neapolitan cooking.¹⁹

Hollywood's most noticeable Italian restaurant was the Italian Kitchens, the "finest Spaghetti House West of New York" according to their advertisements. The restaurant chain had four locations that began with the original downtown Italian Kitchen.²⁰ Open until 3am, and situated near theaters, the location at 6225 Hollywood Boulevard was in the Pantages Theater building, and catered to theater-goers, movie workers, and tourists. A classified newspaper ad, placed amidst high-paying war industries job announcements, sought waitresses and mentioned the tips were exceptional at the eatery—a claim that was especially true during the war with the foot traffic bolstered by soldiers on leave.²¹ The Hollywood Boulevard location closed when its lease expired, and all restaurant equipment including the 40 sets of booths, a twenty-stool counter, and heavy equipment such as a semi-new ten-door refrigerator, was sold at auction. Had Corrado heard about the sale it would have been beneficial to have attended to view the modern industrial equipment for future purchases.²² The "Paramount Italian Kitchen," as it renamed itself on Sunset and Vine, made much use of its location and

¹⁹ Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 192-193; 201-205.

²⁰ "Roundabout," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 January 1966, M3.

²¹ Classifieds," *Los Angeles Times* 26 July 1943, 14.

²² Display Ad, *Los Angeles Times*, 19 March 1950, 20. See also matchbook cover, circa 1945, advertising the four locations of the Italian Kitchens, "California's Newest and Most Modern Spaghetti Houses." Another matchbook advertises the eatery as "California's most modern restaurant" where you could watch your food being prepared in an open kitchen. In the author's possession.

featured a map on the cover of its menu depicting the restaurant as ground zero for all radio and movie studios. While claiming to be authentic by having “painstakingly researched” original recipes, the restaurant assured its patrons that the fare was Americanized “to a point of delectable flavor.”²³

Italian restaurants had an integral place in the motion picture world. With multiple courses, theatrics of the waiters, careful lighting, romanticism, classicism, and often being family-run—not to mention the large banquet rooms—Italian eateries were more conducive for business than other ethnic restaurants in movieland.

Casa D’Amore is often credited as the first Los Angeles restaurant to have served pizza. Pasquale “Patsy” D’Amore, along with his brother Franklyn, started a pizza parlor in Brooklyn, New York in 1925; they later moved to Boston’s North End before arriving in Los Angeles. The brothers settled in Studio City and opened the city’s first pizza parlor in Hollywood on Cahuenga Boulevard in 1939. Befriending celebrities in the Italian community including Frank Sinatra, Joe DiMaggio, and comedian Jerry Colonna, D’Amore’s pizza became a Hollywood favorite of both Italians and non-Italians alike, and the owners soon opened other restaurants on Catalina Island and at the Los Angeles Farmer’s Market in 1949.²⁴ The reverse of the menu from the restaurant featured testimonies of patrons—all celebrities—probably copied from the signed photographs on the wall. Frank Sinatra, Leo Carrillo, and Gene Autry gave one-sentence accolades, but

²³ Paramount Italian Kitchen menu, circa 1950, at 6750 Sunset Boulevard. In the author’s possession.

²⁴ David Hamlin and Brett Arena, *Los Angeles’s Original Farmers Market* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, 2009), 106. “Farmer’s Market Today,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 July 1951, 4.

perhaps the most honorific was that of opera singer Mario Lanza who claimed that the restaurant was the greatest he ever ate at.²⁵

D'Amore's family-run upscale restaurant, Villa Capri, opened in 1950. Originally located on Yucca north of Hollywood Boulevard, the restaurant was housed in a building well-known in movieland as the Masquers Club, a New York-style clubhouse for actors, and was a Masonic Hall just before being used as an eatery. Villa Capri moved to a larger nearby location, and became a low-key movie star hang-out, with reporters and autograph-seekers kept at bay. The décor included red checkered table-cloths and Chianti bottles hanging from the ceiling. With Frank Sinatra as co-owner, the singer advertised in *Variety* that the Villa Capri's food was as good as his mother's cooking back in Hoboken, New Jersey.²⁶

The most famous northern Italian restaurateur in Hollywood was Romeo Salta. He was born in Florence and after working on Italian steamships, immigrated to New York where he cooked for several large hotels. Salta headed to Los Angeles where he briefly worked at Cocoanut Grove and handled wine for the Trocadero. In 1937, he opened his own eatery, Chianti, named for the familiar Italian wine. Initially the place was modest and had sawdust on the floor. After a national newspaper article featured the

²⁵ Casa D'Amore Restaurant and Pizzeria, 1644 Cahuenga Blvd, menu, circa 1950. In the author's possession.

²⁶ Marc Wanamaker, *Hollywood, 1940-2008* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Pub, 2009), 88. Jane Allen, *Pier Angeli: A Fragile Life* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 90. Charles L. Granata, *Sessions with Sinatra: Frank Sinatra and the Art of Recording* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004), 106. Tom Smith, *Drink Up and Be Somebody: A Sinatra Cocktail Companion* (CreateSpace, 2014), 72.

restaurant, Chianti appeared on the culinary map. Located on Melrose near Paramount Studio, Salta introduced several Italian dishes, such as Risotto alla Milenese, to many of Hollywood's elite actors. His success was due to his food being a novelty in Los Angeles: "Everyone else was serving meatballs and spaghetti," he later remembered in an interview.²⁷

In an era when Italian restaurants were called "spaghetti houses," or "Italian dives," Salta attempted to lift Italian food to the level of French cuisine in America. He closed Chianti in 1948 claiming business had become difficult, if it is to be believed, because of the dependence of pensions by a large portion of his aging clientele. Touring the kitchens of Europe for a year, Salta returned, settled in New York and with a partner opened Mercurio in Manhattan serving central Italian cuisine. In 1954 he opened his own well-decorated upscale eatery under his own name, Romeo Salta. Quickly becoming the top Italian restaurant in the city, Romeo Salta was considered to be the third or fourth best Italian restaurant in the entire world.²⁸

Both D'Amore and Salta were influences on Corrado's career. The location of the Casa D'Amore, near Corrado's father's temporary residence on Cahuenga, and the introduction of pizza into Hollywood would not have gone unnoticed by Corrado or his

²⁷ John F. Mariani, *How Italian Food Conquered the World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 57-58. "Chatterbox," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 October 1939, D3. "Pasta Prince Keeps Ahead of Rivals," *Eureka [CA] Times*, 8 March 1977, 20. Romeo's Chianti, as the restaurant was officially named, was at 7383 Melrose Avenue.

²⁸ Jane Nickelson, "News of Food," *New York Times*, 26 June 1954, 16. For the rise of Italian cuisine in America, see John F. Mariani, *How Italian Food Conquered the World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 58.

brothers. Through his lively personality and vaudeville background, Patsy D'Amore was offered a daytime television show on KTTV in 1951: "Come Into the Kitchen." Franklyn, the older D'Amore brother, was an actor and singer and may have known Corrado or his brothers from show business. The Villa Capri restaurant décor may have influenced Corrado who likely visited the restaurant as it became a focal point for Italians to meet with Frank Sinatra who held court at an L-shaped back table.²⁹

Salta was the most famous Florentine in the culinary world and likely knew Gino Corrado. Salta's departure from Hollywood in 1948, in some ways, opened up opportunities for other eateries to be the most authentic Italian restaurant in town. Salta's promotion of "genuine Italian food" as per his advertising included regional central and northern Italian dishes, the use of carefully selected Italian fine wines, and making all food—including pasta—right at the table in front of the customer. In contrast to the familiar red-sauce east coast restaurants, very little tomato or garlic was used in the menu. Corrado saved a photograph in which he appeared with Salta, date unknown, probably from when the famed restaurateur briefly promoted a frozen food line in the 1950s. Quite possibly, Romeo Salta gave Corrado culinary information and convinced him that the world's best known waiter needed his own restaurant.³⁰

²⁹ D'Amore's show ran from 3 until 3:45 daily. See also "D'Amores Entertain, *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 1955, B7.

³⁰ "News of Food," *New York Times*, 3 July 1950, 19. Display Ad, *Los Angeles Times*, 23 November 1938, 5.

In December 1953, Corrado opened Abruzzi Restaurant at 7122 Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. Beautiful announcement cards of the opening sent out to friends such as Joseph D'Alessio, a medical doctor in Beverly Hills, were an indicator that the restaurant was purporting to be an upscale dining establishment and that Corrado was reliant upon Italian-Americans as his clientele.³¹ The name of the restaurant refers to the cuisine from the region of Abruzzo in central Italy. The region is the least populated and the most traditional in Italy. The details of the proprietorship of Abruzzi are unspecified, but most likely Corrado was a lesser partner.

The Abruzzi menu was not too dissimilar from Casa D'Amore. Standard dishes relied on veal, a practice of slaughtering a dairy calf, usually a confined male whose mother had been a dairy cow, when only a few months old. There were ten veal dishes including veal scaloppini marsala, veal cutlet, and veal steak cacciatore. Abruzzi did not serve pizza or stock any of the few southern dishes like linguine marinara Sorrento, but like Casa D'Amore, the restaurant had a seafood menu with jumbo shrimp, New York steak, and a similar dessert menu. None of the traditional dishes from Abruzzo were actually found on the menu; even the four cheeses served were from other regions or foreign countries (gorgonzola, provolone, camembert, and surprisingly, the American creation Leiderkranz). The only Tuscan dish was chicken a la Fiorentino. The salad, for which California was at the culinary forefront, was rather unoriginal, though Caesar salad

³¹ Postcard, from D'Alessio to "Mr. Gino Corrado c/o Abruzzi Restaurant, 7122 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood, CA." postmarked December 5, 1953. D'Alessio writes: "Dear Gino, I wish to acknowledge your beautiful announcement card of the opening of Abruzzi Restaurant. Doris joins me in extending our sincere wishes for a successful future..." GCC.

made the cut—Romeo Salta even kept the salad on his menu when he moved to New York.³²

Abruzzi was on Sunset Boulevard, the one long street that had connected the majority of the studios since the early days, including Reliance, Triangle, the first Warner Brothers location at Sunset and Gower, Chaplin, and Paramount.³³ Abruzzi's location at the corner of Sunset Boulevard and La Brea Avenue put it equidistant between the Hollywood strip where there was an active nightlife and the heart of Hollywood's "radio capitol of the world," Sunset and Vine—which by then, had also become the television center of the world with NBC and CBS. Abruzzi was also about a mile-and-a-half from Columbia Studios and two miles from Paramount Studios. Since it was a prime spot for a high-end eatery that catered to movie people, business could not have been too bad.

Abruzzi was also located near several of Hollywood's television stations, KTLA, KTLA, and KCOP—the future of entertainment and in its heyday in the early 1950s, which would not have escaped a movie actor's attention. An unknown facet of Corrado's career is his work in television, mostly in small bit parts. Since much of Corrado's appearances were on live (as opposed to pre-recorded) television, it is difficult to determine in which shows he appeared.

³² Casa D'Amore Restaurant and Pizzeria menu, circa 1950. Abruzzi, undated, circa 1954. Both menus in the author's possession. For Salta's Caesar salad that was prepared at the table for patrons, see "News of Food," *New York Times* 3 July 1950, 19.

³³ Marc Wannamaker, "The Star's Map to No Where's," in Andre Balazs, *Hollywood Handbook* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1996), 92-93.

One television drama in which Corrado appeared was in a version of *A Bell for Adano* for the CBS network's Ford Star Jubilee that aired on Saturday nights.

Unfortunately, this is not the best example of Corrado's TV work, and does not seem to be comparable to the earlier film version in which he also had a small part. What is worse, the television version of *A Bell for Adano* was a musical. The film was important in a sociological context, and *Variety* magazine was appalled at the addition of the musical numbers: "Victims of Fascism and war, a defeated people shocked at the overthrow of Mussolini and attempting to recover their sanity aren't apt to break out into joyous song continually."³⁴

Abruzzi went out of business in 1955 for unknown reasons. Possibilities could have been that he lost the lease or that he lost his partner. Although the breadth of Corrado's television work is unknown, he finally gave up appearing in films, as presumably having retired from the industry at the age of 63, to focus his energies on a new venture.

Corrado opened a new restaurant in 1956. The restaurant was located approximately five miles from his home in Sherman Oaks on what was the San Fernando Valley's premiere thoroughfare—which was then Highway 101—Ventura Boulevard in the neighborhood of Encino. In contrast to Hollywood, the site lay almost at the edge of

³⁴ *Variety Television Reviews Index I*, 4 June 1956.

the sprawling Los Angeles city limits and was nowhere near any other upscale restaurants that might attract the showbiz crowd.³⁵

A nationwide Associated Press newspaper story explained the inner-workings of the social groups and residences of the film colony sampled after a typical film premier. Delineating the groups by age and economic standing among other categories it also included “usual eating places.” For instance, “pioneers”—referring to those early film moguls and producers—age 60 and up were likely to live in Beverly Hills, eat at expensive hotels and discuss movies and investments (probably in real estate and horses at dinner). The 40-and-up “Settled Set,” perhaps meaning that they were in their last marriage, tended to reside in Bel-Air, Beverly Hills, or Mandeville Canyon and usually ate at Romanoff’s or Chasen’s, according to the article’s graph. They were also very comfortable, less so than the pioneers having millions, yet still better than the 18 to 25-year-olds who resided along the Sunset Strip or in Hollywood Hills and hung out at Ciro’s, Macambo’s, or Schwab’s Drugstore. Corrado’s demographic catered to “young marrieds, ages 25-35,” lived in the San Fernando Valley’s new post-war booming communities, and ate at, simply stated in the article, “better restaurants,”—one such as what Corrado was aspiring to become.³⁶

³⁵ Two other Italian restaurants located near Gino’s included Pucci’s at 16065 Ventura Blvd. and John Aletano’s Lasagna House at 19558 Ventura. Both restaurants opened in 1958, a few years after Gino’s. Gino’s Restaurant was located at: 19727 Ventura Blvd. in Woodland Hills. In the 1964 *Los Angeles Northwest Section Telephone Directory*, 972. Gino’s small advertisement reads: “Wine and dine in old Florentine Splendor...Gino Corrado, your host.” See also “Valley Ramblings,” and advertisement in *Van Nuys News*, 2 October 1958, 35C.

³⁶ Associated Press News Sources photograph dated 13 May 1956. This photo ran in several nationwide Sunday newspaper’s Society columns. In the author’s possession.

Corrado would have been in good company with a few celebrities who had opened their own restaurants in the Valley. Australian golf star Joe Kirkwood had started a restaurant called simply Joe Kirkwood's Restaurant on Ventura Boulevard in Studio City. At the time of Corrado's opening, Kirkwood sold a golf course he had built, and expanded his restaurant into a bowling alley, naming it the Joe Kirkwood Bowl—the café being called the Bella Napoli Room.³⁷

Actor Jack La Rue who usually played gangster roles, actually owned a small spaghetti stand on Ventura Boulevard in Studio City directly across from Sennett Studios (later Republic) that his sister managed and that he would often check on between scenes while filming.³⁸ La Rue, a dark-haired Sicilian whose real name was Gaspare Biondolillo, was brought from New York by director Howard Hawks to originally play the role in *Scarface* that was later given to George Raft. La Rue soon garnered other roles and the actor likely tried to capitalize on his movie fame—as well as cater to the industry in the new Studio City—as his whimsical café was made of spare parts from movie sets. A series of publicity photos showed that he was an accomplished cook who liked nothing better than to prepare his own meals after working at the studio. He often had to turn

³⁷ A matchbook from circa 1960 for the Bella Napoli Room indicates that it had Italian cuisine and entertainment and was inside the Joe Kirkwood Bowl.

³⁸ Hedda Hopper, "Old-Timers Win Favor of Film Fans," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 June 1938, C1. See also "Boy and Girl Held for Trial on Cafe Burglarizing Charge," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 1939, 18. The café address was 11920 Ventura Blvd.

people away according to contemporary reports from the 1930s but it is unknown if his café attracted real gangsters or was simply a hotspot after the studio gates closed.³⁹

A serious influence on Corrado's career as a restaurateur was Chef Joseph Milani, a chef-turned-actor with an inspiring life story. Only a year older than Corrado and from an upper-class background, Milani was born the son of the royal jeweler in Naples. As a youth, Milani had originally trained to become an opera singer, but soon realized he did not have the lungs for it. Instead, he apprenticed himself to one of his father's friends—who was a well-known chef—eventually getting a spot in a top Naples restaurant. After visiting Chicago when he was twenty, Milani later moved there, working at the elite Palmer House Hotel for three years. Milani then came to Hollywood in the 1920s and started a cooking school. He later reinvented cooking showmanship, exemplified by a performance at an auditorium in Portland, Oregon, where he prepared food over four days for thousands of people. While cooking he sang opera—Milani apparently believed it was monotonous to watch a chef—backed by a full orchestra and singing gondoliers.⁴⁰

Milani subsequently lost his fortune in quick time when he became incapacitated and sank into debt due to enormous medical bills. He blamed doctors for his misdiagnosis, as they had treated him for edema, but he actually had fallen arches from endless standing in the kitchen. Without having to stand, Milani started preparing

³⁹ "Nightclubs and Cafes Blossom in Movie Capital," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 July 1937, C3.

⁴⁰ "Notes on Chef Joseph Leopoldi Milani" Studio Biography. Undated, ca. 1945, 1. Margaret Herrick Motion Picture Library, biographical files.

pre-made deli items for restaurants, and with virtually no capital, eventually grew to become one of the pioneers of Italian packaged and canned food stuffs in America, grossing \$1.25 million annually.⁴¹

His success and personality led to him to the Hollywood Canteen on Hollywood Boulevard where he ran the food service, presumably as an act of patriotism—photo opportunities with starlets surely being another motivation. America's most famous nightclub, at least during World War II, the Hollywood Canteen was founded by the motion picture industry and staffed by many celebrities to entertain soldiers during leave on the West Coast. One of Milani's friends Benjamin J. Piazza, a director of talent at RKO studios, gave Milani his first motion picture role because he believed Milani would lend authenticity to RKO's *The Seventh Victim* by playing a proprietor of a restaurant. Soon Milani was in demand for chef parts and competing for roles that Corrado was usually given, such as head waiter or maitre d'. One role for which Milani had no competitors was the 1943 cinematic version of *Hollywood Canteen* playing himself.

The two actors shared the screen in three films. In *Mrs. Parkington*, Milani played a hotel maitre d', while Corrado played a caterer at a ball. The next year Milani and Corrado both appeared in *A Bell for Adano*. Milani had the uncredited role of Capello; Corrado also uncredited, played a baker named Zapulla. For Milani, the film roles were secondary to his cooking career, and Corrado watched as Milani's new television show on KCOP featured many luminaries and made him the chef of the stars. Milani resided

⁴¹ Ibid.

not far from Corrado in the area of Sepulveda (today North Hills), where in 1952, he was made honorary mayor.⁴²

Corrado may have attempted to emulate Milani's success when he tried to appear in commercials. Corrado would have aggressively hunted advertising sponsorships given his connection to food, and any agent would have tried to help him do so; however, Corrado's only known attempt was with Gallo Wine Company who was tapping Hollywood personalities to sell its product. Started by Swiss-Italian immigrants, Gallo grew from a tiny basement winery in the 1910s to a lucrative bootlegging operation during Prohibition and eventually, with the help of large government contracts during World War II in distilling alcohol, became America's largest winery. With an infusion of capital and the return of GIs from Europe, Gallo marketed its wine more like a beer, spending \$762,000 in advertising to earn \$6.3 million in sales in 1946.⁴³

California was the state with the highest per capita consumption of wine, with Los Angeles the winery's key market. Maintaining the position as the market leader, the Gallo Wine Company used top public relations agencies in Los Angeles to advertise in magazines and billboards to upgrade the wine's image from that of a distillery of cheap wine. Through a major advertising agency, Gallo soon began using the new medium of television to advertise. Corrado was approached to do a spot, or perhaps the other way around, but after initial interest, the company apparently changed its mind. "I never

⁴² *Van Nuys News*, 1 May 1952, 54.

⁴³ Ellen Hawkes, *Blood and Wine: The Unauthorized Story of the Gallo Wine Empire* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 170-171.

heard back from them,” Corrado said, “it fell through.” Gallo used celebrities (including opera singers) in its commercials, and as Julio Gallo admitted “not all were well-known.”⁴⁴ Beginning with only one station in Los Angeles, the company expanded to other cities as it could afford it. Cesar Romero, already a movie star and riding a hit TV show, *Cisco Kid*, was the company’s public face in the 1950s. Corrado was known on-screen as a waiter and was a wine-lover, but would have made a poor spokesman. “I don’t like their wine anyways,” he later said, probably in spite, and added, “I like Cribari,” a burgundy wine.⁴⁵

Beyond growing his own herbs and collecting recipes (the latter amassing to a fairly large collection), food science—in the technical sense—was not Corrado’s forte. However, he still connected himself with a chef and restaurant owner that invented the Caesar salad—Caesar Cardini. In the 1920s, while based in Tijuana, Cardini often catered to the Hollywood crowd who crossed the border to avoid Prohibition laws. In 1923, while serving a full house late at night, and with many food supplies exhausted, he concocted a salad that became a hit. Soon named “Caesar’s Salad,” its ingredients were: romaine lettuce, a one minute egg, Parmesan or Romano cheese, lemon juice, garlic, mustard, Worcestershire sauce, white pepper, pear vinegar, and olive oil. Several

⁴⁴ Ernest and Julio Gallo, *Ernest and Julio: Our Story* (New York: Times Books, Randomhouse, 1994), 181-182.

⁴⁵ Gino Corrado interviewed by Bill Cappello, Van Nuys, CA 4 May 1976, Tape 1 and 2

decades later, the Epicurean Society Internationale of Paris complimented the salad as the best thing to come from America in fifty years.⁴⁶

Despite no formal training as a chef, Corrado later boasted that it was from Caesar Cardini that he learned to make the famous salad, but the details of when and where are unknown. Corrado had a second cousin in Mexico in the tiny seaside town of Ensenada where Corrado's mother and brother occasionally visited him at his work at Flor de Italia Café (and who may have been personally acquainted with Cardini), but it is probably when Cardini moved to Hollywood after successfully asserting his claims as the originator of the recipe that Corrado got to know him.⁴⁷ In 1952, Cardini had branched out into salad dressings and opened an Italian grocery store in movieland's La Cienega restaurant row where he oversaw the manufacture of his dressings in a backroom kitchen.⁴⁸

Interestingly, Joe Vallera, Corrado's neighbor who offered him his first job in upscale food service, had picked up and moved like several thousand other Italians to the booming desert town of Las Vegas. If Corrado had partnered with Vallera in opening the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Caterina Maria Liserani. Border Crossings from Mexico to U.S. See 11 December 1940. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; Manifests of Alien Arrivals at San Ysidro (Tia Juana), California, April 21, 1908 - December 1952; Record Group: 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service; Microfilm Serial: M1767; Microfilm Roll: 9.

⁴⁸ Aline Mosby, "Chef who Invents Caesar Salad Frowns on Apers," *San Mateo Times*, 16 June 1952, 11. See also Gino Corrado interviewed by Bill Cappello. Alfredo Mazanni of Flor de Italia was Corrado's mother's cousin. See National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.; Manifests of Alien Arrivals at San Ysidro (Tia Juana), California, April 21, 1908 - December 1952; Record Group: 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service; Microfilm Serial: M1767; Microfilm Ro II: 9.

Abruzzi restaurant, his departure is the likely explanation why the restaurant closed. Also possible, Vallera tried to convince Corrado to move to Las Vegas. About 30 to 40 percent of restaurants in the city and suburbs of Las Vegas were run by Italians or Italian-Americans by the mid-fifties, and Vallera was enjoying success in 1955 with a food feature called *What's Cooking?* on a local television channel, while also operating his own restaurant, Italian Garden. Jews and Southern Italians (often in collaboration and sometimes with shady pasts) had helped build a thriving gambling and resort center that, by the 1960s, overtook Los Angeles as the nation's nightlife capital west of Chicago. Billing Las Vegas as the "Entertainment Capitol of the World," a drive down the strip routinely displayed several popular Italian-American entertainer names on the glowing marquees including Louis Prima and Frank Sinatra. Corrado, like many movie food people around Hollywood, may have considered moving his family to the fast growing town, though he ultimately remained in Los Angeles.⁴⁹

The Valley, where Corrado set up shop, included the "Toluca Lake Restaurant Colony," an area designated for its upscale eateries along Riverside Drive and Barham Street adjacent to Universal Studios, near Warner Brothers Studios, and the Lakeshore

⁴⁹ Alan Balboni, *Beyond the Mafia: Italian Americans and the Development of Las Vegas* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1996), 40.. *Desert Sentinel*, 19 April 1973, 12. Las Vegas Telephone Directory, July 1957, shows Vallera living at 815 S. 2nd St and his restaurant located at 2111 Fremont Street. His *What's Cooking?* ran on a local television channel from 1955-1958. For the nightlife comparison of the two cities, see Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in the Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 144.

Country Club, and not far from the homes of many actors.⁵⁰ The San Fernando Valley was the location for the filming of westerns and the home of most of the motion picture singing cowboys. Along Ventura Boulevard near Republic Studios were a host of restaurants popular with entertainers, including a few chains like Eaton's Rancho which advertised a "Gene Autry Cowboy Sandwich," named after America's favorite cowboy who resided but a few blocks away.⁵¹

A few Italian restaurants existed in the Valley before Corrado moved there. The first may have been Ed Magiora's who owned a small restaurant at 8923 San Fernando Boulevard (near Lankershim Boulevard) in the early 1930s in what was then called Roscoe (today Sun Valley). The one restaurant that may have been patronized by the Hollywood crowd was likely that of Chef Lucrezi who was a caterer at exclusive clubs and cafes including the private Jonathan Club in downtown, a kind of country club that catered to industrialist Republican male membership. Lucrezi set up a café at 5610 Sepulveda in Sherman Oaks as he told the press: "The Valley needs a moderately priced restaurant with comfort and 'class' features." He served raviolis, spaghetti, with the usual blend of American food.⁵²

⁵⁰ Toluca Lake Restaurant Colony matchbook, circa 1950, has a map on the inside which shows restaurants that effected a "gourmet's paradise": Alfonse's, Sorentino's Kings Arms, La Paradiso, Bill Storey's, Casa Toluca, Bob's, Smoke House, Tick Tock, and China Trader.

⁵¹ An Eaton's Rancho Menu from the Laurel Canyon and Ventura Boulevard, dating to circa 1948, indicates the "Gene Autry Cowboy Sandwich" as a small fillet mignon on toast with French fried onions, grilled tomato, and baked or French fried potatoes, costing \$.75.

⁵²"Jonathan Club Chef Opens New Cuisine House in Van Nuys," *Van Nuys News*, 11 September 1939, 2. See also "Bandits Open in Valley Area," *Van Nuys News* 20 September 1934, 1.

By the 1950s, the Valley was on trend with its availability of Italian cuisine. Pucci's at 16065 Ventura Boulevard (intersecting Woodley) in Encino catered to the crowd from local studios with seating for 150, a 250-seat banquet hall with a 16 millimeter projector booth and a ten foot screen.⁵³ A few Italian restaurants still maintained an aura of danger from the early days such as Rondelli's, whose part-owner was notorious gangster Mickey Cohen. Formerly in Studio City, the restaurant reopened in Sherman Oaks only 1,200 feet from Corrado's front door. If Corrado dined there, he would have found that Rondelli's featured a big list of celebrities including Liberace, Ernest Borgnine, and Jerry Colonna. Other eateries included Barone's in Sherman Oaks, Cava D'Oro, Fluky's, and the piano bar Paesano's, best known as the spot where Mickey Cohen was sitting with Jack "the Enforcer" Whalen when he was gunned down in 1959.⁵⁴

Phil Ahn, a Korean-American actor, who also enjoyed the distinction of being the first Korean to be born in America, opened a restaurant on the north side of the Valley (away from any studios) in the early 1950s that remained in business for thirty years. Ahn achieved more notoriety in his acting career, but Corrado was more famous for his role with food on screen. Nevertheless, their stories were somewhat similar in the sense that both actors had been often typecast in ethnic roles: Ahn usually as a Japanese character,

⁵³ "Valley Ramblings," *Van Nuys News* 2 October 1958, 4.

⁵⁴ "Rondelli's Petitions for Bankruptcy," *Van Nuys News* 1 January 1960, 1. See also *Van Nuys Valley News* 17 October 1957, 24C. Rondelli's was at 13359 Ventura. Joe Mascato's at 7301 Van Nuys, Fluky's 9653 Van Nuys Boulevard, and Paesano's was at 17921 Ventura Boulevard until it closed in January 1960 soon after the bad press of the murder. For a history of the allure of dangerous Italian eateries and New York artists, see Michael Lesy and Lisa Stoffer. *Repast: Dining Out at the Dawn of the New American Century, 1900-1910* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 151-152.

and Corrado, if not an Italian waiter, often played a French waiter. Both Ahn and Corrado, at some time, were important in their ethnic communities. And they capitalized on their fame by opening ethnic restaurants. Not all of Ahn's roles were stereotypical, and in *Daughter of Shanghai*, he played the romantic interest of Anna May Wong (his girlfriend in real life). Corrado also appeared in the film in a bit part as an interpreter. Ahn's restaurant Phil Ahn's Moongate on Van Nuys Boulevard in Panorama City (presumably named after Anna May Wong's apartmenthouse called Moongate) served Chinese food. In 1963, Ahn undertook a major remodel and expansion of his restaurant, costing \$300,000, quadrupling his seating and adding private rooms for groups and a new stainless steel kitchen.⁵⁵

Corrado's restaurant was small and intimate, and the décor included marble statues, Italian paintings, checkered red and white table cloths, and straw-wrapped wine bottles hanging from the ceiling. Antique, whimsical, little wind-up singing birds in cages dangled over the booths, and, sitting in the corner, was a 100-year-old miniature organ (the kind organ grinders used) serving as a prop to entertain patrons—particularly children.⁵⁶ Several framed 8 by 10 inch photographs of movie personalities adorned the walls—one that was displayed prominently was a personally inscribed picture of actor Don Ameche. As Corrado was an opera fan, music was a key component in setting the

⁵⁵ "\$300,000 Expansion for Restaurant Set," *Los Angeles Times* 29 September, 1969, Q11. Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *Anna May Wong: From Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 193.

⁵⁶ Gino Corrado interviewed by Bill Cappello, Van Nuys, CA 4 May 1976, Tape 1 and 2.

dining inspiration, with opera records from Italy always playing. Reservations were usually required and reviewers gave the food high praise. Never one to shy away from self-promotion, Corrado's restaurant, located on Ventura Boulevard, which was then the busy Highway 101, was emblazoned with large neon letters that read "Gino Corrado" thus giving him top billing.

The restaurant was officially called "Gino's" and advertised Florentine cuisine typical of Corrado's region, including pizzas.⁵⁷ The restaurant was in business for ten years and in Corrado's words "all the celebrities would come into my place."⁵⁸ Corrado's career truly came full circle as he was now living the parts he had played in film. Clientele sometimes included long-lost acquaintances from Christie Studios, or actors, such as Jackie Oakie (who had played the Mussolini spoof character of Benzino Napolini in Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*), along with newer actors such as Glenn Ford and Shirley Maclaine, making Gino's a popular night spot.

Corrado capitalized on his one role in *The Iron Mask* in 1929. As the film was rediscovered by a younger generation at film festivals, some promotional material during this time listed Corrado as "the last living musketeer." When a new airplane was developed by the Beech Aircraft Corporation, called the Musketeer, a 90-day promotional tour of three airplanes flying in formation and landing in all 48 contiguous

⁵⁷ Northwest Los Angeles Directory (phone book) 1963, 1964. See also "Round About with Art Ryan," *Los Angeles Times* 16 June, 1963, B26 for a favorable review, "the food and wines are excellent." Corrado's 1956 restaurant guest book (part of the GCC) has numerous inscriptions, mostly from musicians that mention "the beautiful Italian music."

⁵⁸ Gino Corrado interviewed by Bill Cappello, Van Nuys, CA 4 May 1976, Tape 1 and 2.

states included a meeting with a Corrado at Van Nuys Airport runway where he leaped with sword in hand for the media.⁵⁹

Along with the new notoriety, Corrado's home life was in turmoil. After 15 years of marriage, Corrado's wife Martha filed for divorce claiming mental cruelty. Corrado hired an expensive lawyer, Fred De Luca (of the firm De Luca and Thabit in Encino) that handled the cases of wealthy celebrities such as Hedy Lamar and Marlon Brando.⁶⁰ Martha's Beverly Hills attorney, future University of California Regent and gay rights activist Sheldon Adelson, was even more expensive—and Corrado was ordered to pay his fees. For three years Corrado experienced the anguished proceedings of a celebrity divorce without the media coverage but with all the theatrics. The case became a costly, prolonged custody battle and fight over assets, with Corrado claiming his marital partner had embezzled over \$6,000 from his restaurant, failed to pay creditors, and bought a house with the money. Both parties filed declarations that claimed the other had threatened bodily violence, and each party was given restraining orders.⁶¹

Surprisingly, the couple reconciled in the mid-sixties and stayed married. Perhaps their daughter Gina was a major consideration as she prepared to enter high school and felt the strain of the divorce and two warring households. Possibly due to

⁵⁹ Gene Nora Jessen, *The Fabulous Flight of the Three Musketeers* (Self-published in Meridian, Idaho, 2009), ix; 82-83.

⁶⁰ Stephen Michael Shearer, *Beautiful: The Life of Hedy Lamarr* New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2010, 69.

⁶¹ Case No. D622607 and D661725, Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Archives and Records Center, Los Angeles, California.

stress involved, Martha's health began suffering. The financial obligations would have also been a factor as the case dragged on and the family's quality of life suffered.

Unfortunately, Corrado became entangled in a dispute with his restaurant partner that in turn forced him to sell out his share of the restaurant in 1966. The landmark sign with Gino's name emblazoned on it was taken down and replaced by a new sign that sported the restaurant's new name, only to have Gino's sign put back up because of a sudden drop in business. With Gino's Restaurant now being operated by his former rotund chef (until its eventual closing a year later), Corrado kept busy during a short stint as a maitre'd at another Italian eatery, Stromboli Restaurant in Sherman Oaks, next to the area's movie palace, the La Reina Theater. Advertisements promised that customers could meet Gino Corrado, former owner and operator of Gino's Restaurant, nightly.⁶² Stromboli served Neapolitan style cuisine and specialized in pizza. After a year there, Corrado announced he would open yet another restaurant, but apparently fell on hard times financially, and by 1970 he was making plans to retire in Italy.

Corrado's later years found him embitter at Hollywood. Before recent methods of including actors' credits from call sheets in their filmographies, most actors who appeared on the screen uncredited were simply forgotten. With no one to reminisce about his early acting days, Corrado began writing actors and directors who were still alive with whom he had worked, such as Allan Dwan, who had directed him in *The Iron Mask* in 1929. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. was delighted to hear from one of the actors in his father's

⁶² *Valley News*, 17 November 1967, 35.

production of *The Iron Mask* and told Corrado: “I so well remember you in the old days, and how very splendid you were in *The Iron Mask*. Incidentally, the picture holds up very well, and is still a fine piece of work.”⁶³ Fairbanks, Jr. starred in *Love is a Racket* in 1932, and might have remembered Corrado who, in the picture, played the waiter of Hollywood’s famous Sardi’s. In another letter Fairbanks remarked, “I can well understand your desire to move to Florence. It’s a magnificent city, and as you know it well, you should enjoy your retirement there very much indeed.”⁶⁴

Corrado never retired in Italy. His Americanized family (neither his wife or daughter spoke Italian, a fact he was embarrassed about) and health concerns probably prevented the move. Another reason may have been that he had financial problems. Despite such an impressive filmography, his decades of work onscreen never qualified him for a pension, as he left the picture business to work in the food industry just prior to the Motion Picture Relief Fund being set up, missing a deadline to apply. At one point he tried to sell items from his collection in storage such as a staff that Charlie Chaplin, in the role spoofing Adolph Hitler, had used on the set of the *Great Dictator*.⁶⁵

In 1968 when he was 75, Corrado moved from his home in Sherman Oaks and took a job as the manager of a small apartment building in Van Nuys at 14027 Oxnard Street. One of the building’s occupants was Robert Benjamin whose stepfather had been

⁶³ Correspondence dated May 16, 1969, from Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. addressed to Gino Corrado. GCC.

⁶⁴ Correspondence dated August 24, 1972, from Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. addressed to Gino Corrado. GCC.

⁶⁵ Gino Corrado interviewed by Bill Cappello, Van Nuys, CA 4 May 1976, Tape 1 and 2.

“Curly” Joe DeRita of the Three Stooges. He would chat with the apartment manager, who he claimed was a “friendly old Italian gentleman who looked familiar to me, but I simply could not place him.” Sharing Italian wine, the two continued to talk from time to time about Hollywood. Benjamin was shocked once he recognized Corrado from several of the best Stooges shorts:

I could not believe the incredible coincidence that my apartment manager was one of the supporting players for the Three Stooges. What memorable performances he had. Who could forget? ⁶⁶

Almost ten years later, Three Stooges fan Bill Cappello hunted Corrado down. Cappello, known for tracking down actors that others could not, interviewed Corrado and published a three-page article entitled “The Search for Gino Corrado” in the *Three Stooges Journal*. Cappello wrote of Corrado: “My favorite Three Stooges short is *Microphonies* (1945) and from what I’ve heard from other Stooges fans it’s considered one of the best, certainly the top five or ten. The short is memorable not only because of the Stooges’ performances, but also because of Christine McIntyre’s singing *The Voice of Spring* and Gino Corrado’s comedic performance as a pompous violinist.”⁶⁷

Corrado deteriorated during his mid-eighties. In 1982 he entered the Motion Picture and Television Hospital in Woodland Hills. Corrado passed away on December 23, 1982 at the age of 89, survived by his wife Martha and daughter Gina. Very little info

⁶⁶ Robert Benjamin, “How I Met Gino Corrado,” *Official Three Stooges Newsletter* n.d., 10.

⁶⁷ Cappello, 6.

was found on his daughter. She married, moved to Santa Barbara and passed away in 2001.

CONCLUSION

Corrado's story is about transnational migration and the international nature of the motion picture industry which still continues today. The actor started out in film just as Hollywood became the movie capital, but as I write this Hollywood is being challenged by runaway production in 30 states and 30 countries. In a January 2015 report by FILMLA, California ranked fourth in total live action film projects with Louisiana (New Orleans), Canada (Toronto and Vancouver), and Great Britain ahead of the Golden State. Wherever the film industry capital moves to next will be followed by the troops of actors much like in Corrado's day when the actor landed in the town of Hollywood in 1916. The recent loss of production to other motion picture hubs had prompted one *Los Angeles Times* reporter to ask if one day soon the Oscars would be held in Atlanta, Toronto, or New Orleans. With many movies set in Los Angeles actually shot elsewhere and only one in 41 big-budgeted films shot in the city, Mayor Eric Garcetti has made stopping runaway production a top priority by increasing tax credits and covering film permit fees.¹

In the summer of 2013, Italy boosted its movie production through a 118 million dollar tax credit for big budgeted productions. Italian legislators, urged by demands from

¹ Dave McNary, "Hollywood Continues to Flee California at Alarming Rate," *Variety* 5 March 2014. FILMLA. "2013 Feature Production Report March 6 2013," FILMLA. "On-Location Filming in Los Angeles Increases 9.6 Percent in 2014," (January 13, 2015 News Release). David Horsey, "Runaway Production leaves California in Lurch," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 January 2014.

the Italian film industry the following year, raised the 6.7 million dollar ceiling to 13 million allowed for a film production company as to attract foreign filmmakers. With Cinecittà and the Venice Film Festival, vestiges of Mussolini's dreams of a cinema empire, still in operation, this may mark a new era in international co-productions which has cyclically continued. Corrado's story clearly shows the pattern since the 1920s with films like *The Eternal City*, *Romola*, *The White Sister*, and *Ben-Hur* and again after the Second World War when in 1954 Corrado appeared in *Three Coins in a Fountain*, a movie filmed in Italy by Twentieth Century-Fox. By 1956 over 43 percent of all American-produced films were shot in foreign locales. In 1967 Spaghetti Westerns and "Sword and Sandal" epics helped that number rise to 70 percent.²

Corrado's story is the story of the Golden Age of Hollywood. One feature film seems it was directly based off his experiences. *Good Morning, Babylon*—itself an American-Italian coproduction—chronicled the Italian and American connection in early motion pictures. The story begins in 1915 when brothers Andrea and Nicolai leave Pisa, Italy for America. Landing jobs in the construction of the Italian pavilion at the San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exposition, they soon learn that D.W. Griffith is building massive sets for the production of his epic *Intolerance* in Hollywood. Griffith, always one who admired the work of Italian craftsmen, quickly hires them. The brothers

² Cinecittà Studios News Release, "Italy Boosts International Productions," 24 August 2014 www.cinecittastudios.it/en/node/2268. "Italy Reinstates \$118 Million Cinema Tax Credit Amid Protest Threats," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 5 August 2013. Ariston Anderson, "Italy Raises Production Tax Credits," *The Hollywood Reporter* 30 July 2014. Daniel Peltzman, "The Impact of Runaway Productions on Hollywood Labor," *INMEDIA: The French Journal of Media Representations in the English-Speaking World*, No. 1; 2012.

proceed to romance and marry beautiful extras in the film. But the onset of World War I disrupts both brothers' careers and they end up fighting for different nations, only to be later reunited in their common love of cinema.

The movie is enjoyable, yet somewhat forgotten today: *Good Morning, Babylon*. According to the 1987 film's promotional material, *Good Morning, Babylon* attempted to serve as a "poignant tribute to the fantasy and magic of Hollywood and the art of filmmaking, both past and present."³ If Corrado's life story brought out a hidden side of Italian Hollywood, it has succeeded in conveying a most unusual story.

Filmmakers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, who were real life brothers hailing from Pisa in the region of Tuscany, and two of Italy's most widely acclaimed directors with *Padre Padrone* (1977) and *Night of the Shooting Stars* (1982), wrote and directed *Good Morning, Babylon*. The film was an allegorical treatment of the American film industry in the year of 1916 (the same year that Corrado came to Hollywood) and a tribute to Italians working behind the scenes who were a part of the American film industry. The story is not based on any particular individual and is pure fiction.

Or is it? D.W. Griffith, did in fact, employ Italian artisans and set builders. Gino Corrado was introduced to the film industry while constructing pavilions at the Panama Pacific Exposition in 1913 or 1914. And Corrado's brother served in World War I before making a foray into motion picture acting. But before Corrado's story can be told as a

³ *Good Morning, Babylon* (1987) Edward R. Pressman Film Corporation, video release. (reverse of cover).

micro-history to illustrate details about Italian and American cinematic relations, we must start at the beginning on the street looking up at the sets of *Intolerance*.⁴

Corrado's story complicates what we know about Hollywood. The Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, co-presented with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, featured "Light and Noir: Exiles and Émigrés in Hollywood, 1933–1950" (a temporary exhibit that ran from October 23, 2014 through March 1, 2015). I visited the exhibit, and a tourguide led us into a projection room continuously showing a clip from *Casablanca* where the French national anthem "Le Marseillaise" is defiantly sung loudly and emotionally by the film's characters. She pointed out how sincere and supportive the actors in the background actually were that were singing, such as the waiters, several of them émigrés who were Jewish exiles. However, as Corrado appeared in *Casablanca* also

⁴ Lloyd Fonvielle, Producer of *Good Morning, Babylon*, was kind enough to relate the origins of the film to this author via email on January 16, 2007: "I read somewhere about the Italian artisans who worked on the Panama Pacific Exposition of 1915—about how Griffith had visited the Exposition and been impressed by their work and conceived the idea of bringing them to Hollywood to work on his sets for *Intolerance*. At the same time I had just seen *Night of the Shooting Stars*, which I admired tremendously. I wanted to find some way of bringing the Taviani brothers to America to work—and suddenly the idea of this merged with the story of the Panama Pacific Exposition of 1915, and I imagined the Taviani brothers making a movie about two Italian brothers involved the making of *Intolerance*. I wrote a short treatment of the idea and took it to the producer Ed Pressman, who also admired the Taviani brothers' work. He sent them the treatment, they liked it, and I went to Rome to talk to them about it. The Taviani brothers wrote a script based on my idea, and Pressman in turn found the financing for the film, and it was made. The Taviani brothers had always wanted to make a movie about two brothers who worked together, but had never found the right subject. I think the fact that it came to them from the outside, as it were, enabled them to embrace it. They also loved the idea of making a film about the early days of movies—to capture the idealism and excitement of that era. In essence, the concept of the story was mine, but the characters of the two brothers were entirely the work of the Taviani brothers, based on their own relationship with each other." [Where Fonvielle may have first read about the Italian craftsmen used in *Intolerance* was Kevin Brownlow's *The Parade's Gone By*.]

playing a waiter, it was clear, to me at least, that if we keep look carefully we may still get other interpretations.⁵

No one had previously told Gino Corrado's story or one remotely like it. Who would dare write about a largely uncredited actor? Corrado actually planned to publish a book about his adventures as an actor in Hollywood. We can only imagine the insights he could share. "It'll be a hot one!" he proclaimed. But unless an undiscovered manuscript turns up at an estate sale somewhere in the Valley or sits unnoticed in some dusty unprocessed collection in a university archive, no such story exists. Had Corrado found the time and focus to write, we might have the definitive guide to the working actor's experience in pre-1960 Hollywood. Until then, what you are reading right now might be the closest thing we have.

Nevertheless, this Corrado story complicates the general narrative of Hollywood history. In essence, experiences such as these are so useful to historians. From the political intrigue that surrounded Vittrorio Mussolini's visit in 1937, to the large wave of anti-Semitism displayed by many of those at the bottom, to the Italian experience as a restaurateur in Hollywood, a counter-narrative to most other tales of the motion picture industry has emerged.

As is the custom for Screen Actor's Guild members who die in need of burial, Corrado was given a plot in Valhalla Memorial Park in North Hollywood. Sadly, family

⁵ Press release, dated October 22, 2014, for "Light and Noir: Exiles and Émigrés in Hollywood, 1933–1950," Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles.
http://www.skirball.org/component/option,com_pressroom/id,436/scope,archive/task,detail/

members did not procure a grave marker for Corrado. Corrado's unmarked grave was finally given recognition, no doubt prompted in part by Bill Cappello whose final sentence of his article was "Perhaps some day a stone will be placed to mark the resting place of one of movie's familiar faces." Gino Corrado Liserani's headstone was purchased by the Three Stooges fan club in 2002. It features a likeness of the actor dressed in a tuxedo from a movie role and his epitaph reads: "Forever in our hearts, forever on the screen."⁶ The irony is that Corrado did not realize how fortunate he was to have worked in an industry where few actually get a chance to appear on the big screen at all. Corrado's career lasted more than fifty years and he had appeared in at least 500 motion pictures, possibly, if his roles as extras are counted, as many as 1,000. With the Turner Movie Channel airing classic movies around the clock, films from the Golden Age appearing on other cable stations, and several of Corrado's films—such as *Citizen Kane*—studied in the classroom, "forever on the screen" might be appropriate.

Like a guidepost through which to study early film in America, the actor Gino Corrado stands at the sidelines. What advice would he give the legions of actors who come to Hollywood in search of a break? When Corrado was 83 years old he was quoted as saying, "I liked acting, but if I was to start again, I'd never be an actor. Never." Believing that the food service had been his true calling, he continued, "I'd go into business like the restaurant. Pictures are all right if you're lucky."

⁶ Gino Corrado Liserani's grave is in the Pierce Brothers Valhalla Memorial Park, 10621 Victory Blvd. in North Hollywood. Lot 6; Section 237 in block Rest Land 'B'. Information about the acquisition of headstone is from telephone interviews with Bill Cappello (film historian and Three Stooges fan club member) by the author in August 2004.

APPENDIX A
GINO CORRADO FILMOGRAPHY

The following is a filmography culled from the American Film Institute catalog, International Movie Database website (IMDB.com), and Paul C. Spehr and Gunnar Lundquist's *American Film and Personnel and Company Credits, 1908-1920* (McFarland and Company, 1996). The *Standard Casting Directory* and Corrado's own photographic publicity stills (as in *Without Mercy*, 1925) have also been utilized. This is not meant to be a complete filmography as some of Corrado's many uncredited appearances as an extra during the 1940s have not yet been included. Proceeding the film title in bold is the studio or production company, followed by the director.

1916

A Sister to Cain (Lubin) Edward Sloman. Shot in San Diego.

Intolerance (Triangle) D.W. Griffith. Gino Corrado is uncredited and plays a runner in the Babylonian sequence.

The Last Challenge (London Film Productions) Harold M. Shaw. Gino Corrado is billed as Eugene Corri, and plays a referee.

Gretchen the Greenhorn (Fine Arts/ Triangle) S. Franklin; C.M. Franklin. An uncredited Gino Corrado plays a wedding guest.

The Evidence (Big U) Robert Z. Leonard. Billed as Eugene Corey.

1917

A Bold, Bad Knight (Christie Film Company) Al Christie

Forbidden Paths (Paramount) Robert Thornby

He Fell on the Beach (Christie) Al Christie

Her Merry Mix-Up (Christie) Al Christie

Green Eyes and Bullets (Christie) Al Christie

Hearts and Clubs (Christie) Al Christie

Love and Locksmiths (Christie) Al Christie

Local Color (Christie) Al Christie.

Almost Divorced (Christie) Al Christie

1918

The Poor Fish (Triangle/ Keystone) Director unknown

The Flames of Chance (Triangle/KB) Francis William Sullivan

Evidence (Triangle) Walter Edwards

The Hopper (Triangle) Thomas M. Hefron

Her Bohemian Party (Triangle) Director unknown

A Good Elk ((Triangle/ Keystone) Director unknown

The Law of the Great Northwest (Triangle) Raymond Wells

Restitution (Mena Film Co.) Howard Gaye

The Velvet Hand (Bluebird) Douglas Gerard

The Wildcat of Paris (Universal) Joseph De Grasse

Nancy Comes Home [Unconfirmed] (Triangle) John Francis Dillon

1919

Shades of Shakespeare (Christie) Al Christie

The Sleeping Lion (Universal) Rupert Julian

Wild and Western (Christie) Al Christie

A Roman Scandal (Christie) Director unknown

1920

The Great Lover (Frank Lloyd/ Goldwyn) Frank Lloyd

Go West, Young Woman (Christie) Al Christie

Her Bridal Night-Mare (Christie) Al Christie

Kiss Me Caroline (Christie) Al Christie

Father's Close Shave (Pathé) Reggie Morris

Going Through the Rye (Christie) Harold Beaudine

Queens are Trumps (Christie) Scott Sidney

Tea for Two (Christie) William Beaudine

Ain't Love Grand (Christie) Al Christie

1921

Movie Mad (Christie) William Beaudine

Naughty Mary Brown (Christie) Frederick Sullivan

Man vs. Woman (Christie) Al Christie

How She Lied (Christie) Sydney Scott

Assault and Flattery (Christie) Frederick Sullivan

Nothing Like It (Christie) Al Christie

Exit Quietly (Christie) Frederick Sullivan

Camille (Nazimova Productions/ Metro Pictures) Ray C. Smallwood. Corrado plays a party guest.

1922

Shattered Dreams [unconfirmed] (Universal) Paul Scardon

The Guttersnipe (Universal) Dallas M. Fitzgerald

Beyond the Rocks (Famous Players-Lasky) Directed by Sam Wood. Corrado (Corey) plays a guest at an inn in the Alps. He is in the foreground (seated in the front row, clapping) enjoying the spirited Bavarian folk band.

The Ordeal (Famous Players-Lasky) Paul Powell

My American Wife (Famous Players-Lasky) Sam Wood

1923

Prodigal Daughters [unconfirmed] (Famous Players-Lasky) Sam Wood

Slander the Woman (Allen Holubar/ First National) Allen Holubar

Adam's Rib (Famous Players-Lasky) Director: Cecil B. DeMille

Flaming Youth (First National) John Frances Dillon

The Ten Commandments (Famous Players-Lasky) Cecil B. DeMille

The Thrill Chaser (Hoot Gibson Productions/ Universal) Edward Sedgwick

1924

Men (Famous Players-Lasky) Dimitri Buchowetski

Honorita Suarez en Hollywood (Circuito Olimpia/ Paramount) Honorita Suarez

Reckless Speed (Hercules /Bud Barsky) William James Craft

South of the Equator (Bud Barsky) William James Craft

The Rose of Paris (Universal) Irving Cummings

1925

Without Mercy (Metropolitan Pictures) George Melford

He Who Laughs Last (Bud Barsky) Jack Nelson

The Coast Patrol (Bud Barsky) Bud Barsky

The Desert Flower (First National) Irving Cummings

Off the Highway (Hunt Stromberg) Tom Forman

Speed Madness (Hercules) Bruce M. Mitchel

The Winding Stair (William Fox) John Griffith Wray [unconfirmed]

Away in the Lead (Goodwill Pictures) Unknown

Never too Late (Goodwill Pictures) Forrest Sheldon

1926

La Boheme (MGM) King Vidor

The Volga Boatman (Famous Players-Lasky) Cecil B. DeMille

Modern Youth (Sam Efrus Productions) Jack Nelson

The Dead Line (Independent Pictures) Jack Nelson

The Amateur Gentleman (Inspiration/ First National) Sidney Olcott

Bardleys the Magnificent (MGM) King Vidor

Beau Geste (Famous Players-Lasky) Herbert Brenon

Gigolo (DeMille Pictures) William K. Howard

Almost a Lady ((Metropolitan) E. Mason Hopper

The White Black Sheep (Inspiration/ First National) Sidney Olcott

1927

Turkish Howls (FBO) Del Andrews

Uneasy Payments (Robertson-Cole Pictures) David Kirkland

The Little Firebrand (Hurricane Film/ Pathé) Charles Hutchison

Paid to Love (Fox Film Corp) Howard Hawks

Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans (Fox Film Corp) F.W. Murnau

Woman's Wares (Tiffany) Arthur Gregor

The Love Mart (First National) George Fitzmaurice

1928

The Cohens and the Kellys in Paris (Universal) William Beaudine

The Devil's Skipper (Tiffany-Stahl) John G. Adolphi

The House of Scandal (Tiffany Stahl) King Baggott

Una Nueva y Gloriosa Nacion (Ajuria) Albert Kelly

Fazil (Fox) Howard Hawks

Prowlers of the Sea (Tiffany-Stahl) John G. Adolphi

The Gun Runner (Tiffany-Stahl) Edgar Lewis

Hot News (Paramount) Clarence G. Badger. According to *Motion Picture News* of 12 May 1928 (page 1606), Corrado was a supporting character alongside Mario Carrillo, May Wallace, Ben Hall, Jack Woody, and John Kolb.

Patience (Tiffany-Stahl) According to the *Standard* (October 1928) casting directory, Corrado appeared in this film.

1929

The Rainbow (Tiffany-Stahl) Reginald Barker

The Iron Mask (Elton Corp/ United Artists) Allan Dwan

Tide of Empire (MGM) Allan Dwan

The One Woman Idea (Fox) Berthold Viertel

Senor Americano (Ken Maynard/ Universal) Harry Joe Brown

Navy Blues (MGM) Clarence Brown

Madame Q (MGM) Leo McCarey. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, *Madame Q* was a courtroom burlesque written and directed by Hal Roach, and billed as an “all-dialogue comedy that promises a long series of laughs.” Besides Corrado, the short featured Edgar Kennedy, Eddie Dunn and, playing the defendant, Jocelyn Lee.

1930

Lord Byron of Broadway (MGM) Harry Beaumont

Those who Dance (Warner Brothers) William Beaudine

A Notorious Affair (First National) Lloyd Bacon

Song off the Caballero (Ken Maynard/ Universal) Harry Joe Brown

Oh, Sailor Behave (Warner Brothers) Archie Mayo

Sin Takes a Holiday (Pathé) Paul L. Stein

Oh, for a Man (Fox) Hamilton MacFadden

1931

The Last Parade (Columbia) Erle C. Kenton

Kiss Me Again (First National/ Warner Brothers) William A. Seiter

Always Goodbye (Fox) Kenneth MacKenna

The Man from Death Valley (Monogram) Lloyd Nosler

That's My Line (RKO- Pathé) Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle

Possessed (MGM) Clarence Brown

Her Majesty, Love (First National/ Warner Brothers) William Dieterle

1932

Hotel Continental (Tiffany Productions) Christy Cabanne

Scarface (Caddo/ United Artists) Howard Hawks

This is the Night (Paramount) Frank Tuttle

Love is a Racket (First National) William A. Wellman

Jewel Robbery (Warner Brothers) William Dieterle

A Farewell to Arms (Paramount) Frank Borzage. In this film about World War I, Gary Cooper is an American in the Italian Ambulance section of Medical Corps at the front in the Italy. In the scene where Santa Lucia is being performed to officers and nurses, there is loud talking towards the rear of the room. Corrado is in an Italian soldier with his back to the camera who jokes about a soldier's strategy as it would let Austria win the war. Another soldier says that if there must be war, one must attack. An officer makes a somber comment about how so many will die. Corrado chimes in, "But what is death to a Christian?" and is joined in laughter.

1933

The Kings Vacation (Warner Brothers) John G. Adolfi

Hallelujah I'm a Bum (Lewis Milestone Productions/ Feature) Lewis Milestone

Grand Slam (First National) William Dieterle

The White Sister (MGM) Victor Fleming

Obey the Law (Columbia) Benjamin Stoloff

The Keyhole (Vitaphone/ Warner Brothers) Michael Curtiz

Picture Snatcher (Warner Brothers) Lloyd Bacon

I Love you Wednesday (Fox) Henry King

Laughing at Life (Mascot Pictures) Ford Beebe. After Captain McHale (played by Victor McLaglen) has organized the fighting force, he accuses Don Flavio (Ivan Lebedeff) of treachery. One of the other three men in that scene to the far left of Don Flavio is Gino

Corrado (in a dark suit). He is shown later when Don Flavio asks him “What happened?” Corrado, wearing a white military jacket, replies, “Who can I say sen~or?”

Voltaire (Vitaphone/ Warner Brothers) John G. Adolphi

My Woman (Columbia) Victor Schertzinger

Walls of Gold (Fox) Kenneth MacKenna

Jimmy and Sally (Fox) James Tinling. This film serves as an examination of 1930s stereotypes. Jimmy is Irish-American James O'Connor, a publicist. The film also examines the institution of marriage—as much as twin beds will allow. Corrado plays a waiter at Pola Winski's.

Girl without a Room (Paramount) Ralph Murphy

Flying Down to Rio (RKO) Thornton Freeland

1934

La Veuve Joyeuse (MGM) Ernst Lubitsch

Bedside (Warner Brothers) Robert Florey

Nana (Samuel Goldwyn/ United Artists) Dorothy Arzner

Wonder Bar (First National) Lloyd Bacon

Whirlpool aka The Forgotten Man (Columbia) Roy William Neill

Viva Villa! (MGM) Jack Conway

He was Her Man (Warner Brothers) Lloyd Bacon. Corrado plays a Portuguese fisherman and can be seen at the end of the film at the wedding.

His Greatest Gamble (RKO) John S. Robertson

One More River (Universal) James Whale

Chained (MGM) Clarence Brown

Lady By Choice (Columbia) David Burton

The Merry Widow (MGM) Ernst Lubitsch

The Marines are Coming (Mascot) David Howard

Broadway Bill (Columbia) Frank Capra

I am a Thief (First National) Robert Florey

Flirting with Danger (Monogram) Vin Moore

Sing Sing Nights (Monogram) Lewis D. Collins

I Sell Anything (First National) Robert Florey

1935

Enter Madame (Paramount) Elliott Nugent

Charlie Chan in Paris (Fox) Lewis Seiler

The Good Fairy (Universal) William Wyler. When Herbert Marshall is going to cut his beard, he goes into a barbershop. Corrado is a barber in the background and Margaret Sullivan accidentally—and dangerously—bumps into his client while he is giving him a shave.

The Great Hotel Murder (Fox) Eugene Forde

The Lost City (Super Serial/ Goodwill Pictures) Harry Revier. Jack G. Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* says, "Introducing a foul and greedy black 'slave trader' abusing the black natives, Ben Ali (Corrado). Speaking with an Italian accent, the Arab barks, 'I'm looking for slaves, giant slaves.'" (page 305)

I'll Love you Always (Columbia) Leo Bulgakov

On Probation (Peerless Productions) Charles Hutchison

The Case of the Curious Bride (First National) Michael Curtiz

Goin' to Town (Major Pictures) Alexander Hall

Airhawks (Columbia) Albert Rogell

Break of Hearts (RKO) Phillip Moeller

Paradise Canyon (Lone Star/ Monogram) Carl L. Pierson

Broadway Gondolier (Warner Brothers) Lloyd Bacon

Hoi Polloi (Columbia) Del Lord. In the very first opening scene of this Three Stooges short, Corrado is the headwaiter who is summoned by the Maitre'D.

Top Hat (RKO) Mark Sandrich

Anna Karenina (MGM) Clarence Brown

Diamond Jim (Universal) A. Edward Sutherland. This film was written by Preston Sturges. Jim Brady's favorite restaurant was Delmonico's.

Ladies Love Danger (Fox) H. Bruce Humberstone

Without Regret (Paramount) Harold Young

I Live my Life (MGM) W.S. Van Dyke

Rendezvous (MGM) Sam Wood/ William K. Howard

Man who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo (Twentieth Century Fox) Stephen Roberts

A Night at the Opera (MGM) Sam Wood

Stars Over Broadway (Warner Brothers) William Keighley

I Dream too Much (RKO) John Cromwell

Miss Pacific Fleet (Warner Brothers) Ray Enright

The Widow from Monte Carlo (Warner Brothers) Arthur Greville Collins

Stars over Broadway (Warner Brothers) William Keighley

Magnificent Obsession (Universal) John M. Stahl

1936

I Conquer the Sea! (Academy Pictures) Victor Halperin

The Oregon Trail (Republic Pictures) Scott Pembroke

Give us this Night (Paramount) Alexander Hall

Doughnuts and Society (Mascot Pictures) Lewis D. Collins

Mister Deeds Goes to Town (Columbia) Frank Capra

Under Two Flags (Twentieth Century Fox) Frank Lloyd

Fury (MGM) Fritz Lang. In this courtroom drama, Corrado is a (presumably Italian) journalist that snaps photos with a small camera whenever there is an outburst. Directed by Fritz Lang, the film is objective, yet elements are from a foreign perspective. When a fainting and shrieking woman turns the courtroom into disorder, Corrado is one of the foreign journalists—next to a Japanese reporter—that rushes to a telephone in the lobby.

Born to Fight (Conn Pictures) Charles Hutchison. In what some call the worst boxing movie of all time, Corrado plays a maitre' d in one of the key plot scenes. Greeting a boxing promoter at the door of a high-class restaurant, he soon tries to break up a fight between him and the Brown Bomber. After pleading with them—"Gentlemen, please don't fight here"—Corrado tends to the injured Smoothy as Bomber makes his escape.

Dodsworth (Samuel Goldwyn) William Wyler

The Big Broadcast of 1937 (Paramount) Mitchell Leisen

Rebellion (Crescent Pictures) Lynn Shores

Under your Spell (Twentieth Century Fox) Otto Preminger

Come and Get It (Samuel Goldwyn) Howard Hawks. It may have been based on his experienced in *Sunrise*, for which Corrado was given this part as a maitre'd, the role which would eventually typecast him. Bowing and gesticulating as if to say, "Right this Way," Corrado takes the hat and coat of timber baron Barrey (played by Edward Arnold). Barrey, Lotta and entourage dine in this first class hotel restaurant in Chicago, whose extravagant marble columns in the dining room were modeled on that of the famous Potter House Hotel.

Love on the Run (MGM) W.S. Van Dyke

1937

Woman-Wise (Twentieth Century Fox) Allan Dwan

Momma Steps Out (MGM) George B. Seitz

Stolen Holiday (First National/ Warner Brothers) Michael Curtiz

Espionage (MGM) Kurt Neumann

Swing High, Swing Low (Paramount) Mitchell Leisen

Café Metropole (Twentieth Century Fox) Edward H. Griffin. In order to get out of a gambling debt with a swanky nightclub owner (played by *Adolphe Menjou*), Tyrone Power, an American in Paris, agrees to romance a young American heiress, played by Loretta Young. Corrado plays a French waiter at a small French outdoor corner café. With a French greeting and lively accordion music heard in the background, Corrado seats Power and Young who order drinks (vermouth and vodka). As he puts in the order, the Russian royal (played by Wallace Beery Jr?), whom Power is impersonating, is coincidentally sitting in the café and, upon overhearing Power degrading his family name, bursts into a Russian language tirade, hastening the departure of the young couple. Though the plot in *Café Metropole* seems preposterous, it is inspired by the real life Romanoff's Restaurant—a Hollywood favorite—whose owner allegedly impersonated Russian royalty to defraud investors and female suitors. In fact, one of the early scenes of *Café Metropole* shows a map of seating arrangements for patrons based on status and spending power, not unlike Romanoffs, who auctioned seats closest to the _____. Several plot devices in *Café Metropole* serve as allegories to Romanoff's: gambling, a bad check, investor relations, income tax problems, special caviar, and a waiter that is actually a Russian prince scolding an imposter.

The Girl from Scotland Yard (Emmanuel Cohen/ Major Pictures) Robert Vignola

A Day at the Races (MGM) Sam Wood.

San Quentin (First National/ Warner Brothers) Lloyd Bacon

Broadway Melody of 1938 (MGM) Roy Del Ruth

Thin Ice (Twentieth Century-Fox) Sidney Lanfield

The Bride Wore Red (MGM) Dorothy Arzner

Angel (Paramount) Ernst Lubitsch

The Great Garrick (Warner Brothers) James Whale

Fight for your Lady (RKO) Ben Stoloff

Expensive Husbands (Warner Brothers) Bobby Connolly

Daughter of Shanghai (Paramount) Robert Florey

Our Gang Follies of 1938 (Hal Roach/ MGM) Gordon Douglas

1938

Fiddling Around (Columbia) Charles Lamont

Dangerous to Know (Paramount) Robert Florey

Rose of the Rio Grande (Monogram) William Nigh

Bluebeards Eighth Wife (Paramount) Ernst Lubitsch

Torchy Blane in Panama (First National/ Warner Brothers) William Clemens

Dr. Rhythm (Major Pictures/Paramount) Frank Tuttle

A Trip to Paris (Twentieth Century Fox) Malcolm St. Clair

Ankles Away (Columbia) Charlie Chase

Rascals (Twentieth Century Fox) H. Bruce Humberstone

Algiers (Walter Wang/ United Artists) John Cromwell. (Spoiler alert) This film is the American version of Duvivier's *Pepe Le Moko* (1936), but the ending is different. In the French version, lead character Pepe, a fugitive Parisian bank robber, is finally cornered and is faced with the prospect of never seeing the girl he has fallen in love with, nor his homeland; he commits suicide in the last scene. The American version, is essentially the same story—only it's a detective, played by Corrado, that accidentally shoots him.

Delinquent Parents (Progressive Pictures) Nick Grinde. This film released in 1938, plays like a 1950s juvenile delinquent/ teen exploitation movie in the house party sequences (complete with hipsters and slang). The picture's story takes on a serious social issue: adoption. Corrado is a waiter at the Cuddles Club, where the adoptee____ (now grown) sings. When she is summonsed by a law enforcement agent at the club for possibly contributing to minors, she agrees to go talk to the judge. Corrado who listened to the conversation, then warns Mr. Carson, owner of the club.

Vacation from Love (MGM) George Fitzmaurice

Sharpshooters (Twentieth Century Fox) James Tinling

Dramatic School (MGM) Robert B. Sinclair

1939

There's That Woman Again (Columbia) Alexander Hall

Devil's Island (Warner Brothers) William Clemens

Three Musketeers (Twentieth Century Fox) Allan Dwan. With occasional inter-titles, the same director and similar sets as *The Iron Mask*, this film certainly pays homage to the earlier Three Musketeers films. Corrado, who was Aramis in *The Iron Mask*, plays a guard in this version. In the Tavern Couteur, the Ritz Brothers are cooks and don uniforms from three drunken soldiers, unknowing of the King's edict against impersonating a musketeer. When D'Artegnan (played by Don Ameche) mistakes the Ritz Brothers as guards that offended him earlier, he engages them in swordplay. When help is summoned from the outside, guardsmen are called to put an end to the disturbance (dueling being illegal). One of the Cardinal's guards is Gino Corrado, who says to the Ritz Brothers (who do not draw swords), "Don't you want to fight?" They reply in unison, "No. We don't want to fight!" Later in the melee, Corrado is knocked out by one of the brothers. Corrado's twirl and fall is very much in a slapstick silent film style.

Wife, Husband, and Friend (Twentieth Century-Fox) Gregory Ratoff

Midnight (Paramount) Mitchell Leisen

Winner Take All (Twentieth Century Fox) Otto Brower

Never Say Die (Paramount) Elliott Nugent

The Return of the Cisco Kid (Twentieth Century Fox) Herbert I. Leeds

Chasing Danger (Twentieth Century Fox) Ricardo Cortez

Pest from the West (Columbia) Del Lord

Saved by the Belle (Columbia) Charlie Chase

Mr. Moto Takes a Vacation (Twentieth Century Fox) Norman Foster. Corrado is a manacled guest in the background at a private exhibition of the crown of Sheba's Queen.

Beau Geste (Paramount) William A. Wellman

Lady of the Tropics (MGM) Jack Conway

Rio (Universal) John Brahm

Mister Smith Goes to Washington (Columbia) Frank Capra

Charlie Chan in the City of Darkness (Twentieth Century Fox) Herbert I. Leeds

Remember? (MGM) Norman Z. McLeod

Gone With the Wind (Selznick/ MGM) Victor Fleming

Wizard of Oz [Unconfirmed] (MGM) Victor Fleming

1940

The Grapes of Wrath (Twentieth Century-Fox) John Ford

Rebecca (Selznick/ United Artists) Alfred Hitchcock. Mr. de Winter (played by Laurence Olivier) unexpectedly proposes to _____ while Mrs. Van Hopper is waiting impatiently in her car. When De Winter telephones the hotel manager, it is Corrado, who goes to her car and reports, "Mr. de Winter says, 'please, for you to come to his room.'"

Brother Orchid (First National/ Warner Brothers) Lloyd Bacon

New Moon (MGM) Robert Z. Leonard

Foreign Correspondent (Walter Wanger/ United Artists) Alfred Hitchcock. At the Fisher Universal Peace Party luncheon for Mr. Van Meer, star Joel McCrea (playing a foreign correspondent) calls the waiter and asks him to try taking another note to a lady. Corrado (the waiter) replies, "I have taken the young lady thirteen notes, sir. She won't accept anymore." (The notes later confuse Carol Fisher when giving a key speech.)

Dance, Girl, Dance (RKO) Dorothy Arzner. This one of several films where Gino Corrado's waiter character is actually known as Gino. Playing the role of waiter at Club Ferdinand, Corrado bows and tells Jimmy Harris (the lead, played by Louis Hayward) "Good Evening, Mr. Harris," to which he is acknowledged, "Gino." Corrado offers champagne (cocktails) and later breaks up a fight between Mr. Harris and his (now newly married) ex-wife's new husband. The club is actually an important character in this story, and the high society melee later makes newspaper headlines.

Hired Wife (Universal) William A. Seiter

Beyond Tomorrow (RKO) A. Edward Sutherland. When James Houston (played by Richard Carlson) sings, the cook watching him is Gino Corrado. Soon joining him in an international version of Jingle Bells, Corrado displays some comedy in his operatic styling of the tune.

Down Argentine Way (Twentieth Century-Fox) Irving Cummings. Corrado is essentially an extra in this picture. At the Tigre Club in Buenos Aires where Carmen Miranda, the Brazilian sensation appears nightly, so the neon sign says (in English, no less), he is seen standing like a Maitre'd as Glenda Crawford, played by Betty Grable, and her guide, enter. Then when she spots Ricardo Quintana at the bar, Corrado walks past in the background.

Moon over Miami (Twentieth Century-Fox) Walter Lang. Lloyd Bacon When the Hotel's waiter Jack wants to tip off Mr. Jeffrey, Susan, screams and then faints as a diversion. Corrado is the chef, and tries to resuscitate by waving his towel in her face. Betty Grable says, "Poor Susan. What she needs is air. Please leave it to us." Corrado says (gesturing to the servants), "Alright, Come on, come on."

The Great Dictator (Charles Chaplin Productions/ United Artists) Charles Chaplin. Corrado plays the role of the sculptor who creates the bust of the Hitler character, played by Charlie Chaplin. When "Hitler" is to meet Benzino Napolini (Mussolini—played by Jackie Oakie) in his office, it becomes a battle to project the more important image, and he is told to seat Napolini by his bust, to "make him feel inferior."

The Mark of Zorro (Twentieth Century-Fox) Rouben Mamoulian. When ____ (the new Alcalde) calls a meeting of the caballeros in Los Angeles to announce that they have caught Zorro and will execute him, Corrado is clearly visible in a brown suit, next to Don Vega, in a close-up.

Bitter Sweet (MGM) W.S. Van Dyke

Kitty Foyle (RKO) Sam Wood

1941

Six Lessons from Madame La Zonga (Universal) John Rawlins

The Great Lie (Warner Brothers) Edmund Goulding

A Shot in the Dark (First National/ Warner Brothers) William McGann

That Night in Rio (Twentieth Century-Fox) Irving Cummings. Larry Martin is posing as Baron Manuel Duarte (both roles played by Don Ameche) and is left at the stock exchange in Rio de Janeiro with the order *not to buy or sell any stock*. He accidentally waves to someone that he thinks is saying hello. Corrado plays a stock broker that is told that this gesture must mean that Machado (played J. Carroll Nash) is selling his airline stock. Corrado says, "He must have heard about the airmail contract—that's what it is."

When it is revealed that the baron has bought 10,000 shares, a buying frenzy ensues on the stock market floor.

Lady from Louisiana (Republic) Bernard Vorhaus

Citizen Kane (Mercury Productions/ RKO) Orson Welles

Affectionately Yours (Warner Brothers)

Blood and Sand (Twentieth Century-Fox) Robert Mamoulian (also features Monty Banks)

Forced Landing (Paramount) Gordon Wiles

Sunset in Wyoming (Republic) William Morgan

An Ache in Every Stake (Columbia) Del Lord

Swing It Soldier (Universal) Harold Young.

Week-end in Havana (Twentieth Century-Fox) Walter Lang

Moon Over Her Shoulder (Twentieth Century-Fox) Alfred L. Werker

Swing it Soldier (Universal) Harold Young

The Feminine Touch (MGM) W.S. Van Dyke

Paris Calling (Universal) Edwin L. Marin

1942

Secret Agent of Japan (Twentieth Century-Fox) Irving Pichel

We Were Dancing (MGM) Robert Z. Leonard

Take a Letter, Darling (Paramount) Mitchell Liesen

It Happened in Flatbush (Twentieth Century-Fox) Ray McCarey

Butch Minds the Baby (Universal) Albert S. Rogell

I Married an Angel (MGM) W.S. Van Dyke

Wings for the Eagle (Warner Brothers) Lloyd Bacon

Tales of Manhattan (Twentieth Century-Fox) Julian Duvivier

The Talk of the Town (Columbia) George Stevens. In a restaurant scene, Dean Lightfoot takes out Regina Bush, a blonde beauty parlor owner. When Dean Lightfoot discovers Clyde Bracken—Regina's boyfriend—is still alive and that Regina is lying, she yells, "Help! Help! Throw this guy out!" Corrado is one of the waiters that comes to her assistance.

My Sister Eileen Alexander Hall (Columbia)

I Married a Witch (United Artists) Rene Clair

Fall In (Hal Roach/ United Artists) Kurt Neumann

Casablanca (Warner Brothers) Michael Curtiz

1943

Phantom of the Opera (Universal) Arthur Lubin

Chetniks (Twentieth Century-Fox) Louis King

Hello Frisco, Hello (Twentieth Century-Fox) Bruce Humberstone

Hit Parade of 1943 (Republic) Albert S. Rogell

Fight For Freedom (RKO) Lothar Mendes

They Got Me Covered (Samuel Goldwyn/RKO) David Butler

Clancy Street Boys (Monogram) William Beaudine. After a night out on the town at the expense of a long, lost uncle—the governor of Texas, no less—the gang leave together in a taxi. A member of the gang (who is dressed as a female) is dropped off from the taxi. A fresh pedestrian (Corrado) sees him, and thinking he is a girl, says, "Hello sweetheart. What's your hurry?" Upon which __ instantly decks him, knocking Corrado unconscious.

Mission to Moscow (Warner Brothers) Michael Curtiz

Wintertime (Twentieth Century-Fox) John Brahm

I Dood It (MGM) Vincente Minnelli

My Kingdom for a Cook (Columbia) Richard Wallace

Lost Angel (MGM) Roy Rowland

1944

In Our Time (Warner Brothers) Vincent Sherman

Action in Arabia (RKO) Leonide Moguy

Sailor's Holiday (Columbia) William Berke

Shine On Harvest Moon (Warner Brothers) David Butler

Cowboy and the Senorita (Republic) Joseph Kane

Mr. Skeffington (Warner Brothers) Vincent Sherman

Man From Frisco (Republic) Robert Florey

Wilson (Twentieth Century Fox) Henry King

Marriage is a Private Affair (MGM) Robert Z. Leonard

Mrs. Parkington (MGM) Tay Garnett

Storm over Lisbon (Republic) George Sherman

End of the Road (Republic) George Blair

House of Frankenstein (Universal) Erle C. Kenton

Nothing but Trouble (MGM) Sam Taylor

Dark Waters (Benedict Bogeaus Productions/ United Artists) Andre DeToth

Experiment Perilous (RKO) Jacques Tourneur

1945

A Song to Remember (Columbia) Charles Vidor.

Dancing in Manhattan (Columbia) Henry Levin

Escape in the Desert (Warner Brothers) Edward A. Blatt

Where Do We Go From Here? (Twentieth Century Fox) Gregory Ratoff

Flame of Barbary Coast (Republic) Joseph Kane

A Bell for Adano (Twentieth Century-Fox) Henry King

Radio Stars on Parade (RKO) Leslie Goodwins

Sunset in El Dorado (Republic) Frank McDonald. When a flashback scene begins in this Roy Rogers and Dale Evans western film, dancing girl Kansas Kate Wiley (played by actress Dale Evans) walks through the Golden Nugget saloon towards the stage. The figure to her right that bows and takes off his hat to greet her is Gino Corrado.

The Dolly Sisters (Twentieth Century-Fox) Irving Cummings. In this film that explores military victory in Europe—during World War I—made while America is on the eve of victory in World War II, Corrado is the French train conductor holding a lantern as jubilant singing World War I American soldiers walk by. He blows his whistle and sends the train on its way, a departure which metaphorically separates Jenny and John Payne.

Micro-Phonies (Columbia) Edward Bernds

Yolanda and the Thief (MGM) Vincente Minnelli. A 1945 film about a fictitious country called “Patria,” a land with no extradition laws—a cross between Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile. Just after Fred Astaire and Fred Morgan win a coin toss over Mr. Candle for a satchel bag full of money at a restaurant, a waiter (played by Corrado) immediately brings them a bottle of ’29 champagne. Fred Astaire cheers, “To Patria, the land of milk and money.”

Saratoga Trunk (Warner Brothers) Sam Wood

An Angel Comes to Brooklyn (Republic) Leslie Goodwins

Cornered (RKO) Edward Dmytryk

1946

The Fighting Guardsman (Columbia) Henry Levin

The Madonna’s Secret (Republic) William Thiele

To Each His Own (Paramount) Mitchell Leisen

The Catman of Paris (Republic) Leslie Selander

Passkey to Danger (Republic) Leslie Selander

Two Sisters from Boston (MGM) Henry Koster

The Strange Love of Martha Ivers (Hal Wallis/ Paramount) Lewis D. Milestone. After the lead character's getting out of jail party, Corrado is in the opening scene when it cuts to the restaurant. Corrado is difficult to distinguish, because he has his back to the camera.

Sing While You Dance (Columbia) D. Ross Lederman

Holiday in Mexico (MGM) George Sidney

Faithful in My Fashion (MGM) Sidney Salkow

Honeymoon Blues (Columbia) Edward Bernds

Blondie Knows Best (Columbia) Abby Berlin

Deception (First National/ Warner Brothers) Irving Rapper

The Beast with Five Fingers (Warner Brothers) Robert Florey

Humoresque (Warner Brothers) Jean Negulesco. With so many nightclubs and violinists integral to the picture's story, it is surprising that Corrado does not appear in a more prominent role other than an extra—a concert spectator. In violinist Paul Boray's final concert performance in the film, a teary eyed Corrado is clearly visible in the audience, seated next to Boray's girlfriend Gina, played by Joan Chandler.

1947

Calendar Girls (Republic) Allan Dwan

Mr. District Attorney (Columbia) Robert B. Sinclair

Nora Prentiss (Warner Brothers) Vincent Sherman

The Michigan Kid (Universal) Ray Taylor

Hit Parade of 1947 (Republic) Frank McDonald

Dishonored Lady (Hunt Stromberg/ United Artists) Robert Stevenson

The Web (Universal) Michael Gordon

Brute Force (Universal) Jules Dassin

Fiesta (MGM) Richard Thorpe

Second Chance (Twentieth Century Fox) James S. Tinling

The Invisible Wall (Twentieth Century Fox) Eugene Forde

Blondie in the Dough (Columbia) Abby Berlin

That Hagen Girl (Warner Brothers) Peter Godfrey

My Wild Irish Rose (First National/ Warner Brothers) David Butler

Road to Rio (Paramount) Norman Z. McLeod

1948

I Walk Alone (Paramount) Byron Haskin

On Our Merry Way (Miracle/ United Artists) Leslie Fenton, King Vidor,

Arch of Triumph (Enterprise/ United Artists) Lewis Milestone

Dream Girl (Paramount) Mitchell Leisen

Romance on the High Seas (Warner Brothers) Michael Curtiz. When the character Mrs. Elvira Kent (played by Janis Page), sees her name on a poster for a concert in Rio de Janeiro, she goes to the nightclub. In a carnival celebration complete with balloons, Georgia Garrett, played by Doris Day, performs for the costumed audience. Corrado, here as an extra, can be seen directly in front of the stage, wildly clapping in what appears to be a Pagliacci clown outfit—minus the hat.

Julia Misbehaves (MGM) Jack Conway

One Touch of Venus (Artists Alliance/ Universal) William A. Seiter

The Countess of Monte Cristo (Universal) Frederick De Cordova

Words and Music (MGM) Norman Taurog

1949

Stratton Story (MGM) Director: Sam Wood. While Stratton dines with his wife at an Italian restaurant before he goes back to the major leagues, Corrado can be seen in the background—behind the counter, serving oysters.

Madame Bovary (MGM) Vincente Minnelli. As a French agricultural official at a fair (on stage, sitting with top hat), Corrado's character seems bored as Charles Bovary (played by Van Heflin) gives a longwinded speech about farming and being a doctor.

Fighting Kentuckian (Republic) George Waggner. After Kentucky troops enter Demopolis and are dismissed, Willie Paine, played by Oliver Hardy, accepts a challenge to wrestle for a jug of Jamaican rum. As the rest of the soldiers join in the melee, John Breen, played by John Wayne, assures a French general that it is just horseplay. In this scene, Corrado is a French uniformed soldier in the background with a starched mustache. When Fleurette De Marchard (played by Vera Ralston) pleads with John Breen to do something about the disruption, Breen excuses himself, and Corrado can again be seen as a spectator.

Life of Riley (Universal) Irving Brecher

1950

Paid in Full (Paramount) William Dieterle

Captain Carey, U.S.A. (Paramount) Mitchell Leisen

The Petty Girl (Columbia) Henry Levin

Harvey (Universal) Henry Kostner

Hit Parade of 1951 (Republic) John H. Auer

1951

Belle Le Grande (Republic) Allan Dwan

The Fat Man (Universal) William Castle

Up Front (Universal) Alexander Hall

Secrets of Monte Carlo (Republic) George Blair

The Prince who was a Thief (Universal) Rudolph Mate

An American in Paris (MGM) Vincente Minnelli [unconfirmed, as Oscar Wilde]

1952

Assignment: Paris (Columbia) Robert Parrish

Something to Live For (Paramount) George Stevens

Steel Town (Universal) George Sherman

1953

Ma and Pa Kettle on Vacation (Universal) Charles Lamont

1954

Casanova's Big Night (Paramount) Norman Z. MacLeod. One of the most distinguished guests at the wedding reception party before the wedding (near the end of the film) is the Ambassador from Naples, played by a wigged Corrado.

Three Coins in the Fountain (Twentieth Century Fox) Jean Negulesco

Living it Up (Paramount) Norman Taurog

APPENDIX B

LOUIS DUMAR FILMOGRAPHY

Louis Dumar, born Luigi Liserani in 1896 in Boston, was the younger brother of Gino Corrado. The two never appeared on-screen together. Dumar had a short career in films, however, he pre-dated his older brother's foray into movie food service, as he was a manager of Willard's restaurant (today, the sight of the last Derby restaurant) which was partly owned by Cecil B. DeMille, and catered to many actors in the 1930s. Later he managed the Fox Studios commissary called Munchers Cafe. Despite being an outspoken supporter of Italy during the Fascist Era, Liserani was briefly in charge of the Mess Halls (as Chief Steward) at the Santa Anita Assembly Center for Japanese internees during World War II.

1921

The Lady from Longacre (William Fox) George Marshall. Interestingly, this film has several actors with brothers who are also actors (besides Dumar). Francis Ford, who plays a role in this film, had convinced his brothers Edward and John to get into the motion picture industry around 1915. John eventually becoming the famous director John Ford.

The Great Impersonation (Famous Players- Lasky) George Melford

1922

The Golden Gift (Metro) Maxwell Karger

You Never Know (Vitagraph) Robert Ensminger

1923

Salome (Nazimova Productions) Charles Bryant

1924

The Only Woman (First National) Director: Sydney Olcott. The film about a woman's surrendering herself at the altar to help her parents was partly filmed around Catalina Island, and starred Norma Talmadge, Eugene O'Brien, Matthew Retz, Winter Hall, Percy Williams, and Murdock McQuarrie.

1951

The Great Caruso (MGM) Richard Thorpe. A young and unknown Enrico Caruso, played by Mario Lanza, works for his girlfriend's mill-owner father, Egisto Barretto, played by Nestor Paiva. At one of his stops at a pizzeria in Naples while delivering flour, Caruso auditions for agents from the opera house and lands his first singing job. Dumar (Liserani) is in the kitchen wearing white and can be seen kneading dough in the foreground at right.

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VITA

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Pringle returned to the Los Angeles area after completing his coursework at Loyola University Chicago. He taught at Los Angeles City College and in 2013/ 2014 he taught at California State Polytechnic University Pomona. He currently lives in the picturesque Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles with his partner and their four children.